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EZEKIEL AND THE POLITICS OF YAHWEH

A Study in the Kingship of God

by
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DECLARATION

I, Christopher R. Bechtel, hereby declare that I have written this thesis and that the work it contains is entirely my own. I furthermore declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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ABSTRACT

The book of Ezekiel, like much of the Hebrew Bible, depicts Yahweh as a king. However, Ezekiel's presentation of Yahweh's kingship has been largely ignored by modern scholarship, and, when it has been addressed, has been categorized as a grand metaphor for Yahweh's divine superiority. In contrast, this study argues that Yahweh's kingship is a genuine political force, not merely a cipher for the exalted status of Israel's deity. To answer the objection that 'Yahweh is king' is a metaphor, Chapter 2 shows that the approach to metaphors so commonly applied in Biblical Studies is deficient. A new approach is thus warranted and provided, enabling utterances such as 'Yahweh is king' to function within a spectrum of literality.

To show that Ezekiel's presentation of Yahweh's kingship merits consideration as a literal claim, Chapters 3-7 offer a close reading of the five texts that overtly hail Yahweh as king: Ezekiel 1-5, 8-11, 20, 34, 40-48. The political ramifications of Yahweh's kingship are shown to be of such importance that Yahweh's kingship is best understood as a claim for Yahweh himself to govern his people as a political, not merely religious, king. Chapter 8 briskly traces several key themes throughout the book confirming that Ezekiel presents Yahweh's kingship in order to establish divine rule over all human affairs. And Chapter 9, as a conclusion, ties together the previous chapters while also demonstrating the value of the thesis both for scholarship on the book of Ezekiel and for the broader question of the kingship of God.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAWG	<i>Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen</i>
AASF	<i>Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae</i>
AbrNSup	Abr-Nahrain: Supplement Series
AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
AcBib	Academia Biblica
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ASTHLS	Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science
ATD	Alte Testament Deutsch
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAC	Bible in Ancient Christianity
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BCOT	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament
BDB	Brown, Driver and Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
BETAP	<i>The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives</i> . Edited by M.S. Odell and J.T. Strong
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibIntSer	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BJS	Biblical and Judaic Studies
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BM	tablets in the British Museum, London

BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BS	The Biblical Seminar
BRLAJ	Brill Reference Library of Ancient Judaism
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CANE	<i>Civilizations of the Ancient Near East</i> . Edited by J. Sasson
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CHANE	Culture & History of the Ancient Near East
CL	<i>Cognitive Linguistics</i>
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W.W. Hallo
CRB	Cahiers de la Revue Biblique
CT	<i>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum</i>
DCH	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by D.J.A. Clines
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Edited by K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst
DSB	Daily Study Bible
EH	Europäische Hochschulschriften
EHB	<i>Ezekiel and His Book</i> . Edited by J. Lust
EHW	<i>Ezekiel's Hierarchical World</i> . Edited by S.L. Cook and C.L. Patton
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
EvT	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FWCAD	From the Workshop of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
GOTR	<i>Greek Orthodox Theological Review</i>
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner

HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HW	History of Warfare
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBHS	<i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Edited by B. Waltke and M. O'Connor
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Biblical Quarterly</i>
JCS	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JPSTC	Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LASBF	<i>Liber annuus Studii biblici franciscani</i>
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies

LISL	Library and Information Sources in Linguistics
LR	<i>The Linguistic Review</i>
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
MHUC	Monographs of Hebrew Union College
NAK	<i>Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis</i>
NCB	New Century Bible
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensa analecta
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
OtSt	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
PAAJR	<i>Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research</i>
PBM	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
PEGBLS	<i>Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society</i>
PFES	Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society
PPR	<i>Philosophy and Phenomenological Research</i>
PRS	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>PsyBul</i>	<i>Psychological Bulletin</i>
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RRJ	<i>Review of Rabbinic Judaism</i>
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SB	Source Biblique
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBET	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien
SCS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies

ScrHier	Scripta Hierosolymitana
SEÅ	<i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i>
SeptCS	Septuagint Commentary Series
SHBC	Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary
SHCANE	Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SJSJ	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
ST	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
StudBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature
SubBib	Subsidia Biblica
SVA	Schriften zur vorderasiatischen Archäologie
TAB	<i>The Art Bulletin</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren
TEL	Topics in English Linguistics
ThB	Theologische Bücherei
ThZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by E. Jenni and C. Westermann
TOTS	<i>The Old Testament Student</i>
TrinJ	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TynB	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
USQR	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
VAB	Vorderasiatische Bibliothek
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

CHAPTER 1—WHO IS EZEKIEL’S KING?

(INTRODUCTION)

1. Setting the stage

In February 2010, David Greig’s play *Dunsinane* premiered at the Hampstead Theatre in London to resounding acclaim.¹ Amidst a Shakespearean balance of humour and tragedy, Greig explored national identity and political leadership in eleventh-century Scotland.

King Macbeth has died, and England seeks to play the power vacuum to her advantage. The English general Siward leads a coup geared to establish Malcom as a Scottish king who will kowtow to the English overlords. However, Gruach, the queen of Scotland, resists English rule. In a piercing exchange with Siward, she objects that, even if Malcolm did wear the crown, he would not be king. Instead, she claims, the son she bore to Macbeth is already the king, having inherited the throne at his father’s death. Siward retorts that the boy is not the king, since he lacks the crown and is too young to rule. And, more problematically, Malcolm has been crowned by authority of England.

Siward and Gruach operate with conflicting conceptions of who has a just claim to be king. But who is correct? Greig’s lively script never arbitrates, and the debate between Siward and Gruach becomes a vehicle for Greig to insinuate that there is no univocal concept of ‘king’. Wielders of political power fit more than one mould.²

¹ D. Greig, *Dunsinane* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010).

² Cf. Chapters 4 and 6-7

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Greig's sterling stagecraft connects with his audience in part because the fictional political realities of eleventh-century Scotland readily translate to twenty-first century Britain and beyond. The locus of political authority is often ambiguous. The testimony of the Hebrew Bible suggests that the challenge of identifying ultimate authority is hardly new. David, for example, was anointed king but initially lacked royal trappings (1 Samuel 16); in contrast, Jeroboam gained an entire kingdom but no anointing (1 Kings 12). Even more problematic is the frequent designation of Yhwh as king, since Yhwh, unlike David or Jeroboam, lacks physical symbols of kingship and cannot be anointed, yet he acts like a king. Compounding the conundrum further, the ancient people who hailed Yhwh as king lived under the rule of human kings. The task of identifying the true king is complex.

2. Plot

This study explores the possibility that when the book of Ezekiel extols Yhwh as king, the ancient writer(s) and audiences understood an affirmation of political realities rather than a figurative (i.e., metaphorical) description of Yhwh's grandeur and power. The aim here is to assess whether the book of Ezekiel describes Yhwh as a genuine player in the public exercise and legitimation of power in national Israel,³ that is, in Israel's politics.⁴ The book

³ Here acknowledging the thorny matter of identifying 'ancient Israel', as trumpeted recently in P.R. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History—Ancient and Modern* (Louisville: WJK, 2008), 47-57. For ease of expression, however, throughout this thesis 'Israel' refers to the corporate whole that features in the Hebrew Bible, specifying 'Judah' when appropriate. It bears noting that here, as throughout, I limit literature citations to representative and significant sources in order to streamline the thesis by avoiding the drag of immense footnotes.

⁴ Cf. the definition of politics adopted in N.K. Gottwald, *The Politics of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: WJK, 2001), 7. In contrast, Y. Hoffman limits 'politics' to the dealings between nations,

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of Ezekiel provides fertile ground for this project. Outright depictions of Yhwh as king bookend its narratives and oracles, suggesting even from an initial glance that Yhwh's kingship is an important theme to the book.⁵ Three other overt expressions of Yhwh's kingship appear throughout the book, adding weight to the suspicion that Ezekiel has more than a passing interest in presenting Yhwh as a royal figure. When read within the context of these five explicit statements of Yhwh's kingship, other features of the book also appear charged with political import. Ezekiel is thus primed for an exploration of Yhwh's kingship.

Royal language for Yhwh permeates the Hebrew Bible, and investigations of Yhwh's kingship chequer the academic landscape.⁶ But these myriad studies largely neglect how Yhwh's kingship might function as a political force within the worlds the Hebrew Bible describes.⁷ For example,

'Reflections on the Relationship Between Theopolitics, Prophecy and Historiography', in *Politics and Theopolitics in the Bible and Post-biblical Literature* (ed. H.G. Reventlow, Y. Hoffman and B. Uffenheimer; JSOTSup 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 85.

⁵ T. Renz rightly states that 'all chapters [of Ezekiel] can be said to presuppose the kingship of Yahweh', but he surprisingly assumes that only Ezekiel 34 and 40-48 feature this as 'the explicit topic', *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* (VTSup 76; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 129.

⁶ The literature is voluminous. Broadly, J. Gray, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Reign of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979). More focused, J.H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (2nd ed.; BS 3; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986). An important article is G.V. Smith, 'The Concept of God/the Gods as King in the Ancient Near East and the Bible', *TrinJ* 3 (1982): 18-38.

⁷ A notable exception is O. O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

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H.D. Preuss representatively sees that Yhwh's kingship was 'a statement of faith that was especially oriented to the future...'.⁸

Marc Brettler's excellent study of royal language for Yhwh represents a major factor in this neglect on account of its foundational assumption that Yhwh's kingship is metaphorical.⁹ But is it? Challenging this assumption facilitates the possibility of finding political significance in Yhwh's kingship. When applied to the book of Ezekiel, this abstract possibility acquires concrete evidence, and the book of Ezekiel then becomes a major clue that the observations about kingship in Greig's play *Dunsinane* have antecedents in a literary world some 2500 years their senior.

3. Script

As developed in this thesis, the case for reading Ezekiel's Yhwh as a political figure stands on three legs. 1) Chapter 2 considers the linguistic leg, asking whether the concept of metaphor, employed so deftly in Brettler's work, fully accounts for how language works. More specifically, the question is whether Yhwh's kingship is metaphorical. On the binary model that sees statements as either figurative or literal, the sentence 'Yhwh is king' naturally lands on the side of the figurative since Yhwh is not a king in the same way that Nebuchadnezzar or Jehoiachin were kings. However, on a model that more accurately reflects language usage, 'Yhwh is king' falls on a spectrum that runs from (ontological) identity to absurdity. In asking whether Yhwh or the

⁸ H.D. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (trans. L.G. Perdue; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 157-58.

⁹ M. Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (JSOTSup 76; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989).

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human political figure was king, the answer then shifts from the polarized 'yes' or 'no' to a qualified affirmation or denial. The linguistic leg of this thesis opens wide the door of possibility that Ezekiel's Yhwh is king in a (literal) political sense, not merely in a (figurative) theological sense.

2) Chapters 3-7 form the thickest leg of the case for Yhwh's political persona, successively examining the five overt expressions of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel 1-3, 8-11, 20, 34, and 40-48. Devoting the bulk of this study to these royal portrayals quells any dispute about the dominance of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel. After all, Yhwh's throne (Ezekiel 1, 10, 43) obviously identifies him as a royal figure.¹⁰ The royal theme is also unmistakable when Yhwh tells his errant people, 'I will be king over you' (20:33), and the ancients would immediately recognize Yhwh's claim to kingship in the statement 'I myself will shepherd my flock' (34:15). In exploring these passages, the dominant interest of Chapters 3-7 is how Ezekiel describes Yhwh as king, and consideration of each passage serially, rather than topically, permits the nuances of each instance to contribute to a royal picture of Ezekiel's Yhwh.

3) Chapters 8-9 build the final leg. Since references to Yhwh's kingship bracket the book, a reasonable question is whether his kingship extends beyond the overt expressions studied in Chapters 3-7. Accordingly, Chapter 8 offers a brisk re-reading of Ezekiel through the lens of Yhwh's kingship in order to posit a positive answer. Yhwh's kingship pervades the book. For example, Yhwh's royal role as lawgiver (43:12) suggests that the

¹⁰ Chapter 3 nuances this statement since the Hebrew כִּסֵּא also allows the more general gloss 'chair'.

legal terms scattered throughout the book resonate with royal tones.

Chapter 9 shows the upshot of Chapters 2-8: reading Yhwh's Ezekielian kingship as political, not figurative, is viable, and it plants seeds for exploring the political significance of Yhwh's kingship throughout the Hebrew Bible.

4. Stagehands

This three-legged approach to Ezekiel is unique. Of course, novelty alone hardly justifies a study. But the topics to hand—Yhwh's kingship and ancient politics—are hotly contested, and the proposed approach promises to suggest new perspectives on the Hebrew Bible and its ancient world. In this respect, investigating Ezekiel and the politics of Yhwh is valuable, if not desirable.

Given the nexus of subjects, numerous monographs and articles serve as interlocutors.¹¹ To be sure, Ezekiel research has not overlooked the political dynamics of Yhwh's kingship, inasmuch as they precipitate out of the intersection between Yhwh and the Davidic figure (Ezekiel 34, 37) or the power structures in Ezekiel 40-48. And these brief but worthy engagements receive appropriate note in later chapters. But no systematic study has engaged the full implications of Yhwh's kingship in the book of Ezekiel. Still, six book-length studies, four published and two unpublished, provide springboards for the trajectories sketched here. These six bear special mention in order to disambiguate them from the present project.¹² In turn,

¹¹ For example, on political theology in the Hebrew Bible, D.J. Reimer, 'Political Prophets? Political Exegesis and Prophetic Theology', in *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel* (ed. J.C. de Moor; *OtSt* 40; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 126-142 and J.G. McConville, *God and Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology* (LHBOTS 454; London: T&T Clark, 2006).

¹² Two articles also front Yhwh's royal role in Ezekiel: P. Joyce, 'King and Messiah in Ezekiel', in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 323-337 and D.I. Block, 'Transformation of

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this acknowledgement highlights their respective contributions, clarifies the uniqueness of the present work, places it within a scholarly context and signals its intellectual creditors.

1) Focusing on six oracles in Ezekiel 1-39, Bernard Lang's *Kein Aufstand in Jerusalem* views Ezekiel as a political document involved with matters of state prior to Nebuchadnezzar's sacking of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.¹³ The present work heeds Lang's pleas for greater attention to the political contours of Ezekiel. But, in contrast to Lang, this study presupposes that a dichotomy between the political and religious is both unnecessary and unfaithful to the intricacies of the ancient text. As argued here, a close reading of Ezekiel suggests that the international political intrigue discussed by Lang is fully ascertained only when Yhwh himself enters the fray.

2) More attuned to the religio-political tensions, Iain Duguid's *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel* examines how the entire book of Ezekiel addresses the religious and political elite of Judah and Israel. In the interplay between the judgment and restoration oracles, Duguid observes an artful development that relentlessly critiques cultic violations and abuses of power.¹⁴ Regrettably, though, Duguid neglects Yhwh's kingship as a feature of Ezekiel's well-

Royal Ideology in Ezekiel', in *Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition and Theology in Ezekiel* (ed. W.A. Tooman and M.A. Lyons; Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2010), 208-246. In spite of their importance, both articles allow for the development and nuance presented here.

¹³ B. Lang, *Kein Aufstand in Jerusalem: die Politik des Propheten Ezechiel* (2nd ed.; SBB 7; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981). The oracles are Ezek 12:1-15, 17:1-10, 17:11-21, 17:22-24, 19:1-14, 21:23-37.

¹⁴ I.M. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel* (VTSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1994).

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ordered society. So, while following Duguid in attending to the blending of religion and politics, the present study locates Yhwh's kingship at the forefront of Ezekiel's vision for the religio-political nexus of ancient Israel.

3) Andrew Mein also recognizes the intertwining of cult and state, as he explicates Ezekiel's challenge and proposal for righteous society.¹⁵ Building on Lang, Mein argues that the politics of the book operate in parallel spheres of the national and international; Ezekiel is concerned with both the political elite and the ordinary citizen. Mein's sensitive treatment of the sociological ethics dominating Judah in the sixth century BCE supports the present interest in Ezekiel's politics. However, like Duguid, Mein neglects exposition of Yhwh's kingship, an omission that the present study corrects.

4) In *The Vision of Transformation*, Kalinda Rose Stevenson contends that the politics of Yhwh's kingship are essential for the rearranged, ideal society envisioned in Ezekiel 40-48. While suggesting the suitability of the present study, Stevenson ultimately strains in a different direction by seeing Yhwh's political kingship as a subset of what she sees as the larger project of Ezekiel 40-48: 'territorial rhetoric'.¹⁶ As argued here, however, the central feature of Ezekiel's final vision is not space itself but the ruler of that space. So, a more accurate assessment of Ezekiel 40-48 will invert Stevenson's territorial concerns with Yhwh's kingship. Nevertheless, in treating Yhwh's

¹⁵ A. Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (OTM; Oxford: OUP, 2001).

¹⁶ K.R. Stevenson, *The Vision of Transformation: The Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40-48* (SBLDS 154; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), 3 and *passim*.

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kingship as a political entity, Stevenson's work is a welcome development that will inform the study of the entire book.

5) The unpublished thesis of Terry Clark suggests fruitful possibilities for studying Ezekiel's formulation of Yhwh's kingship, but several lacunae flag the need for further investigation of the theme.¹⁷ a) Clark lacks interaction with numerous notable scholars, including Duguid, Lang, Mein and Stevenson. b) The heavy interest in rhetoric tends toward light treatment of exegetical details. c) Yhwh's kingship appears primarily in religious light, receiving little appreciation for its political possibilities. The present study fills these and other lacunae, gratefully benefitting from Clark's first foray into the subject.

6) Madhavi Nevader's thesis constructs a case that, born in the crucible of exile, both Deuteronomy and Ezekiel deal in demoted monarchs, curtailing royal privilege by presenting Yhwh as a king over Israel.¹⁸ Like the present work, Nevader aims to show that Ezekiel's depiction of Yhwh's kingship goes beyond the ancient commonplace that hailed gods as kings to a new paradigm that activates Yhwh's kingship as a political force in itself. Nevader has produced an analysis of Ezekiel that converges on several points with what follows independently in this thesis.

Yet important differences remain, most notably the focused attention to the book of Ezekiel that features here and thus permits a richer

¹⁷ T. Clark, "I Will Be King Over You": The Rhetoric of Divine Kingship in the Book of Ezekiel' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Denver/Illiff School of Theology, 2008).

¹⁸ M. Nevader, 'Exile and Institution: Monarchy in the Books of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 2009).

exploration of the matter. Also, while Nevader sets her thesis within ongoing scholarly dialogue about ancient Israel’s monarchy, this thesis finds its closer analogues in works that consider the kingship of Israel’s god. Further, this thesis, unlike Nevader’s, questions and replaces the truism that the deity’s kingship is a metaphor. For sustained engagement of Nevader’s work, I await the publication of her monograph, but, even now, Nevader’s is worthy of consideration here and elsewhere in the ongoing quest to arbitrate who was king in ancient Israel (or at least in the Hebrew Bible).¹⁹

5. Setting

Recent decades have seen the Masoretic text of Ezekiel carved into minute textual units.²⁰ In this study, however, the drama of Yhwh’s kingship will play out upon the full stage of MT Ezekiel. In the main, there is little attempt to examine the book’s developmental layers or to discover an original core around which the final literary product grew.²¹ This tack derives primarily from a pragmatic concern to provide a broad yet manageable input of data for the thematic study of Yhwh’s kingship.²² The challenge of applying a

¹⁹ Here recognizing the disputed matter of how the Hebrew Bible reflects history, a topic largely beyond the present scope. Briefly, see §4 below. More extensively, M.B. Moore and B.E. Kelle, *Biblical History and Israel’s Past: The Changing Study of the Bible and History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

²⁰ For example, J. Garscha’s redactor’s knife diced Ezekiel to a purportedly original twenty-one verses. *Studien zum Ezechielbuch: Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung von Ez 1-39* (EH 23; Bern: Herbert Lang, 1974).

²¹ K.-F. Pohlmann pursues a thoroughgoing investigation from this angle, *Das Buch Hesekiel/Ezechiel* (2 vols.; ATD 22; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996, 2001).

²² Engaging the differences between MT and LXX traditions, for example, would overextend the scope. J. Lust presents an admirable case study of these differences, ‘Ezekiel’s Utopian Expectations’, in *Flores Florentino: Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish Studies in Honour of*

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consistent approach to the redaction criticism of Ezekiel also influences the pursuit of a broadly holistic reading of Ezekiel, since even sketching a method for pursuing a redactional reading would detract from the aims of this study.²³ So, in the interest of a streamlined approach, a primarily synchronic reading of Ezekiel informs this study of Yhwh's kingship.²⁴

That said, emphasising the literary unity of Ezekiel does not imply a disinterest in the book's ancient world. Thirteen times the text employs a variation of the date formula found in the book's first verse: 'In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month', and the specificity and frequency of the dates suggest that, at the very least, the book's author(s) meant to place the prophetic experience of the prophet Ezekiel within a recognizable human history.²⁵ So, even if textual development stretched the book's creation over several centuries, the Ezekiel tradition purports to originate in a single era, the tumultuous time of Neo-Babylonian dominance under Nebuchadnezzar II.²⁶ And a successful exploration of Yhwh's kingship

Florentino García Martínez (ed. A. Hilhorst, É. Puech, and E.J.C. Tigchelaar; SJSJ 122; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 403-419.

²³ For balanced analysis of a redactional approach for Ezekiel, P. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (JSOTSup 482; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 13-16.

²⁴ Still, in light of twentieth-century trends for a diachronic reading of Ezekiel, each of the major textual units examined in Chapters 3-7 receives an introductory defence of literary unity.

²⁵ Most recently, T. Mayfield explores the literary significance of these dates, *Literary Structure and Setting in Ezekiel* (FAT II.43; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 84-124.

²⁶ Cf. K.S. Freedy and D.B. Redford, 'The Dates of Ezekiel in Relation to Biblical, Babylonian, and Egyptian Sources', *JAOS* 90 (1970): 462-465. With slightly modified view E. Kutsch, *Die chronologischen Daten des Ezechielbuches* (OBO 62; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1985), 73.

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will cooperate with the apparent historical aims of the book by reading it within the milieu of the sixth century BCE in Western Asia.

As seen below, the convergence between the book of Ezekiel and its purported context is important for interpretation. Aside from providing an historical backdrop, the sixth century BCE frames Ezekiel within a wider literary context that offers clues for deciphering passages that contribute to Yhwh's kingship. Admittedly, extending the contextual borders to include material beyond the Hebrew Bible may risk charges of what Samuel Sandmel famously called 'parallelomania'.²⁷

However, the purpose is not to draw parallels but to illuminate Ezekiel's Yhwh by widening the aperture, permitting a broader range of materials to expose what Ezekiel does in painting Yhwh with a bold, royal brush.²⁸ Here, the general principle guiding this comparative approach is that options from the Hebrew Bible must first be deemed inadequate to explain matters in question.²⁹ For example, Ezek 48:30-35 names a city after Yhwh, whom the entire vision of Ezekiel 40-48 portrays as a king.³⁰ Eponymous cities are rare in the Hebrew Bible but common features of royal material in the

²⁷ S. Sandmel, 'Parallelomania', *JBL* 81 (1962): 1-13.

²⁸ Several studies of Ezekiel have successfully taken this route, especially J. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (BJS 7; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000).

²⁹ For terse introduction to the comparative method, W. W. Hallo 'Introduction: Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Their Relevance for Biblical Exegesis', *COS*, xxii-xxvii. More extensively, M. Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies* (AOAT 227; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 13-78.

³⁰ See below Chapter 7, §4.2.

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wider ancient Near East, suggesting the value of peering beyond the Hebrew Bible for understanding Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel.

Situating the book of Ezekiel in the high sixth century BCE during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar currently enjoys a scholarly consensus. Duguid states, 'the book of Ezekiel in its present form is a coherent and consistent whole, written in the time of the exile'.³¹ And Mein proclaims it 'one of our best sources for understanding the experience of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia'.³² But not all take this position.³³ Philip Davies, for example, dismisses the historicity of Ezekiel as of 'dubious reliability'.³⁴ Hardly new, this view first found traction in Gustav Hölscher's 1924 study that denied the historical self-attestation of the book.³⁵ As Paul Joyce helpfully observes, the criteria influencing scholars who have followed Hölscher largely rest on unfounded assumptions about identifying original prophetic material.³⁶

³¹ Duguid, *Leaders of Israel*, 8.

³² Mein, *Ethics of Exile*, 50.

³³ Over a century ago S. R. Driver could represent the guild in stating, 'No critical question arises in connection with the authorship of the book [i.e., Ezekiel]. It bears unmistakably the stamp of a single mind', *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (6th ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 279. Today, as D. Banks observes, scholars disagree on what even counts as a historical fact, *Writing the History of Israel* (LHBOTS 438; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 13.

³⁴ P.R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'* (JSOTSup 148; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 80.

³⁵ G. Hölscher, *Hesekiel: der Dichter und das Buch; eine literarkritische Untersuchung* (BZAW 39; Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1924). Hölscher's now classic denial of Ezekiel's historicity differs from that of Davies in method but not in outcome.

³⁶ P. Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel* (JSOTSup 51; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 22-25.

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Joyce might have gone farther in his critique, however, in order to highlight that behind denials of Ezekiel's historicity lies an even deeper assumption regarding the knowability of history (whence Davies' ideas). Detailing and responding to this deeper source of debate demands more attention than presently available. But even in registering the presence of philosophical assumptions, the present study stabilizes its foundation.³⁷ Thus, considering Ezekiel's portrayal of a royal Yhwh within a Neo-Babylonian context stems from studied reflection on the knowability of history, not naïve acceptance of the text's self-attestation.³⁸ In the final analysis, cooperating with the sixth century BCE context pays dividends by pointing to a rationale for Ezekiel's preoccupation with Yhwh's kingship.³⁹ And, in building on sturdy footing, this study proceeds with intellectual credibility, even if the full case for its philosophical assumptions must be developed elsewhere.

6. Curtain up

David Greig's play *Dunsinane* lacks mention of kingship in ancient Israel, let alone in the book of Ezekiel. But *Dunsinane* suggests a promising pathway into the book of Ezekiel by highlighting the ambiguities related to the locus of royal power. Not unlike the battle that Greig depicts between Scottish and

³⁷ Cf. H. Barstad, *History and the Hebrew Bible: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography* (FAT 61; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 7.

³⁸ Another set of reasons to take a sixth-century BCE setting concerns the editing of the book that most likely neared completion during this period. R.E. Clements, 'The Chronology of Redaction in Ezekiel 1-24', in *EHB*, 283-294 and T. Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetic Books* (BS 20; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 96.

³⁹ See Chapter 9.

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English forces, the examination of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel requires patient effort, as Chapters 3-8 wade through portions of the Hebrew Bible's most terrifying text.⁴⁰ Resolving contested kingship is a complex task. However, by following the script sketched above (§3), this study will demonstrate that, in spite of the attendant ambiguities, the book of Ezekiel operates with a decided opinion about who wields political power over the people of ancient Israel. The next chapter begins to build the case.

⁴⁰ Cf. M.A. Sweeney on rabbinic concerns about Ezekiel, 'The Problem of Ezekiel in Talmudic Literature', in *After Ezekiel: Essays on the Reception of a Difficult Prophet* (ed. A. Mein and P. Joyce; LHBOTS 535; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 11-23.

CHAPTER 2—WILL THIS KING REIGN? (YHWH'S KINGSHIP AND METAPHOR)

1. Introduction

Reigning opinion sees royal language for Yhwh as metaphorical, communicating theological rather than political realities. Trygve Mettinger has called this a 'root metaphor' of the Hebrew Bible.¹ Another volume has even seen the need to reassert the importance of metaphor for Yhwh's kingship.² This chapter, however, presents the first plank in an alternative explanation of this royal language. The worthy work of Marc Brettler, noted in the previous chapter, provides a foil for the new proposal advocated here, and briefly situating Brettler's theory within its intellectual context will better illuminate his position. In turn this will clarify the alternative approach of this chapter and ground the trajectory of the whole thesis.

Academic study of metaphor is a mine and a minefield, not least because of the volume of sources. In 1971 the philosopher and historian Warren Shibles catalogued more than four thousand titles.³ Less than twenty years later, over seven thousand more titles appeared.⁴ Today, metaphor

¹ T.N.D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (trans. F.H. Cryer; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 92.

² A. Moore, *Moving Beyond Symbol and Myth: Understanding the Kingship of God of the Hebrew Bible through Metaphor* (StudBibLit 99; New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

³ W. Shibles, *Metaphor: An Annotated Bibliography and History* (Whitewater, Wisc.: Language Press, 1971).

⁴ J.-P. Noppen et al. *METAPHOR: A Bibliography of Post-1970 Publications* (ASTHLS 5; LISL 17; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1985) and *METAPHOR II: A Classified Bibliography of Publications 1985-1990* (ASTHLS 5; LISL 20; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990).

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theory is a common tool for unpacking figurative language in the Bible.⁵

However, in spite of the voluminous literature, biblical scholars, including Brettler, have tended to follow one strand of metaphor theory, the work of the linguist George Lakoff.⁶

With the philosopher Mark Johnson, Lakoff coauthored *Metaphors We Live By*, developing a fresh approach to metaphor.⁷ Borrowing from advances in cognitive science, Lakoff and Johnson conceived of metaphor as a complex linguistic and mental process called ‘mapping’ that transfers concepts from one word or phrase to another.⁸ When the mapping process is incomplete, a metaphor is born; complete mapping process produces no metaphor. For example, in the sentence ‘my heart is heavy’, only some concepts of ‘heavy’ transfer to ‘heart’. In contrast, the sentence ‘my heart is a muscle’ fully transfers the concepts of ‘muscle’ to ‘heart’. As Lakoff and Johnson put it, ‘the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another’, and this happens most creatively when elements of

⁵ For a substantive list of OT works handling metaphor, B.E. Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective* (AcBib 20; Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 39-41.

⁶ Recently in J. Y. Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered: A Cognitive Approach to Poetic Prophecy in Jeremiah 1-24* (HSM 64; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010).

⁷ G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980)

⁸ Over thirty years after Lakoff and Johnson, cognitive linguistic theory has roared into its own as a dominant linguistic theory. Consequently, an engagement with this massive field exceeds present needs. Further, since Brettler’s work on Yhwh’s kingship appeared in 1989, attention will focus primarily on the putative founders of cognitive linguistic metaphor theory, Lakoff and his colleagues. For a current treatment of the theory, Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* (2nd ed.; Oxford: OUP, 2010).

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the source clash with those of the target.⁹ This description of metaphor intuitively makes sense, and, because it seems to describe everyday uses of language so accurately, Lakoff and Johnson suppose that a majority of concepts are metaphorical.¹⁰ In another book Lakoff even suggests that ‘it could be the case that every word or phrase in a language is defined at least in part metaphorically’.¹¹

Brettler adopts this theoretical backbone developed by Lakoff to explain Yhwh’s kingship in the Hebrew Bible as a grand metaphor which he encapsulates in the sentence ‘God is king’.¹² He operates from the ‘fact’ that an ancient Israelite would have known intuitively that ‘certain elements intrinsic to kingship could not be projected onto God’, e.g., dynastic descent.¹³ In other words, Brettler recognizes the imperfect mapping of ‘king’ to ‘God’ and concludes that the sentence ‘God is king’ is a metaphor. The non-equivalence of the two components of the metaphor is what theorists have described as ‘semantic incongruity’, and it is this incongruity that bequeaths

⁹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 5.

¹⁰ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 4.

¹¹ G. Lakoff and M. Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), 119.

¹² Though he does allow Judg 8:22-23 and 1 Sam 8:4-9, 10:19 as presenting a non-metaphorical notion of God as king, Brettler, *God is King*, 24.

¹³ Brettler, *God is King*, 20.

to metaphor its mysterious and powerful ability to communicate freshly.¹⁴ To Brettler, the ‘conflict’ between features intrinsic to human kingship and features intrinsic to God unquestionably make ‘God is king’ a metaphorical rather than a literal statement.¹⁵

2. ‘God is king’: not a metaphor

While Brettler’s work merits acclaim for its painstaking exposition of a key theme in the Hebrew Bible, not all scholars accept the linguistic foundations upon which he builds. David H. Aaron, for example, states his disagreement bluntly, ‘there is nothing “intrinsic to kingship” that forces us to see the phrase “God is king” as metaphorical’.¹⁶ And he supports this opinion by investigating the purported obligation to take all language about God as non-literal. Moreover, he constructs an alternative linguistic foundation on which a statement like ‘God is king’ is not necessarily figurative. Aaron’s case deserves attention as an intriguing challenge to Brettler and the dominant opinion regarding Yhwh’s kingship. More importantly, though, as developed below, Aaron’s case offers a coherent and useful perspective for considering Yhwh’s kingship in political light.

2.1 God-language

As already noted, Brettler assumes that the sentence ‘God is king’ is figurative, on account of the partial transfer of concepts from ‘king’ to ‘God’.

¹⁴ K. Wu felicitously refers to the effect of metaphor as ‘joy’ because of the satisfaction that comes in surprisingly seeing one thing as another, *On Metaphoring: A Cultural Hermeneutic* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 36.

¹⁵ Brettler, *God is King*, 20. On the necessity of incongruity for metaphor see E.F. Kittay, *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 64-67.

¹⁶ D.H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics and Divine Imagery* (BRLAJ 4; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 39.

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In concluding his study, Brettler identifies another reason for taking Yhwh's kingship metaphorically: God is the 'incomparable one' and thus necessarily described in metaphor (non-literality).¹⁷ So, in addition to the linguistic foundation, Brettler works with a theological assumption that can only be met by wading into the deep waters of philosophical theology.

The intersection of finite human language and the infinite divine is one of the deep-seated problems of philosophy, and the rich, polarizing literature on the subject suggests the absence of a simple solution.¹⁸ However, the outcome of the present study is unaffected by this debate because the overarching interest here is not the morality or even legitimacy of language about God. The focus, instead, is on how the book of Ezekiel uses royal language to describe Yhwh. Or, put another way, what is Ezekiel doing with the words that depict Yhwh as a king? Framing the question like this releases the present study from forays into philosophical theology since historical and literary concerns lie at the heart of the project.¹⁹

To be sure, even this approach to the question encounters complexities. Thorkild Jacobsen, for example, concludes that worshippers in the ancient Near East self-consciously employed metaphor—by which he

¹⁷ Brettler, *God is King*, 159.

¹⁸ For substantive discussion of the matter see J.M. Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: OUP, 1985) and R. Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (2nd ed.; Oxford: OUP, 2007), 38-52.

¹⁹ Cf. Aaron, *Ambiguities*, 35. More precisely, of course, this chapter and all reflections on language derive from philosophical agendas, but the present scope prohibits further exploration of these considerations. Cf. Chapter 1, §5.

means equivocal language—for all things religious.²⁰ Conversely, John Walton contends that the ancient literature described a deity's ontology in human terms as an expression of the belief that, although transcendent, the divine was not beyond the realm of human experience. Walton argues further that classical Western theology has mistaken the anthropomorphic language as mere metaphor, not for any element in the language itself, but on account of the philosophical sensibilities that underpin the theological tradition.²¹ But arbitrating the positions of Jacobsen and Walton returns the focus to the historical and literary question of what the ancient authors were doing with the words they ascribed to deities. Exploring this question requires investigation of the linguistic rationale for understanding 'God is king'.

2.2 Linguistic foundations

Since Brettler's understanding of metaphor builds on Lakoff, David H. Aaron narrows to analyze the linguistic foundations they construct.²² As noted above, Lakoff defines metaphor as a component of human communication that describes one concept in light of another. For example, in the sentence 'Life is a journey', concepts corresponding to 'journey', such as 'travelling',

²⁰ T. Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University, 1976), 3-9, 20-21.

²¹ J. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 87-91, 99-111.

²² The impetus for the following critique of Lakoff derives from Aaron. But also, V. Haser, *Metaphor, Metonymy and Experientialist Philosophy: Challenging Cognitive Semantics* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2005).

‘path’, and ‘starting point’ are all available for mapping or transferring to ‘life’. Thus we speak of ‘life hitting a dead end’ or ‘the road of life’.²³

In order to explicate this transfer of concepts, Lakoff distinguishes two linguistic phenomena: conceptual metaphor and metaphor. As argued especially in *Metaphors We Live By*, all metaphors have a conceptual metaphor. For example, ‘the road of life’ is a metaphor which invokes the conceptual metaphor, ‘life is a journey’. Lakoff argues that a metaphor will be clearer when understood in conjunction with its governing metaphorical concept. So, the idea of ‘the road of life’ finds clarity when seen as a subset of the notion that all of ‘life is a journey’. The idea of journey through time governs and gives rise to the metaphor ‘the road of life’. Although intuitive, this distinction bears significant flaws, as closer examination shows. Addressing these flaws enables an unsettling of the hegemony that the Lakoff model has enjoyed over opinion regarding Yhwh’s kingship.²⁴

2.2.1 Critique

1) Lakoff proposes no controls for identifying the metaphorical concept that governs a metaphor. Granted, he advocates using ‘the most specific metaphorical concept’ to label the entire system, but he offers no rubric for assessing specificity, i.e., what counts as ‘most specific’.²⁵ For example, with the conceptual metaphor ‘life is a journey’, how does one know that this is a basic metaphorical concept and not simply a derivative of a more general

²³ Lakoff and Turner, *Reason*, 62.

²⁴ To be clear, while I offer a largely negative appraisal of Lakoff, the goal is not to upend his entire theory but only to highlight its problems as applied by Brettler to understanding Yhwh’s kingship.

²⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 9.

concept, such as ‘life is movement’?²⁶ Or, more germane to the present project, how does one know that ‘God is king’ is not a derivative of the more general metaphor ‘God is human’ or, even more broadly, ‘God is a creature’? Objecting that these latter two metaphors do not obtain in the Hebrew Bible does not help, since Lakoff would have all metaphors ‘form a single system based on subcategorization’.²⁷ Michiel Leezenberg thus rightly notes that Lakoff’s proposals appear *ad hoc* and unsustainable under scrutiny.²⁸

2) Lakoff supposes that an utterance is either metaphorical or literal.²⁹ But many statements resist such simple bifurcation because the sense of an utterance is often partially literal. If ‘life is a journey’ were wholly figurative, with no purchase on experienced reality, the sentence would be unintelligible. As it is, though, in some respects ‘life is a journey’ rings true; in a very real sense, life entails movement toward a destination. The facile distinction between metaphorical and literal deserves reconsideration because language is more complex than the binary model allows. Language is latent with ambiguity, and the utterance ‘God is king’ is no exception.

²⁶ See the similar concern in R. Jackendoff and D. Aaron, review article of G. Lakoff and M. Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, *Language* 67 (1991): 324.

²⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 9

²⁸ M. Leezenberg, *Contexts of Metaphor* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), 144-145.

²⁹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 4. Aaron has highlighted the irony that Lakoff and Johnson eschew an objectivist semantics (*Metaphors*, 185-225) but have basically adopted an objectivist approach to metaphor, *Ambiguities*, 110.

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3) When examined closely, the Lakoff model produces absurdities.³⁰

Highlighting this problem, Aaron and the linguist Ray Jackendoff developed a diagnostic showing that the Lakoff model fails to account for the mental processes involved in unravelling the incongruity of the traditionally understood metaphor.³¹ As will be clear, the brain engages a traditionally defined metaphor in a different way than it handles a metaphor as defined by Lakoff. A brisk tour of the diagnostic will help to undermine the Lakoff model that underpins Brettler's understanding of Yhwh's kingship. In turn, this removes the linguistic obstacle to exploring the political import of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel. With slight modification the diagnostic works like this:³²

- a) *Metaphor* Name the metaphor.
- b) *Conceptual metaphor* Identify the conceptual metaphor in the form 'X is Y'.
- c) *Incongruity* Tease out the incongruity of the metaphor.

For example, here is a traditional metaphor.

- a) *Metaphor* He is a machine.
- b) *Conceptual metaphor* People are inanimate objects.
- c) *Incongruity* Of course, people aren't really inanimate objects, but if they were, you might say that he is a machine.³³

³⁰ Unrelated to present concerns, a fourth flaw with the Lakoff model is its capacity to empty a traditional metaphor of descriptive power that enables fresh perspective, Soskice, *Metaphor*, 81 and G. Murphy, 'On Metaphoric Representation', *Cognition* 60 (1996): 173-204.

³¹ Jackendoff and Aaron, review article, 326.

³² Jackendoff and Aaron identify the conceptual domains first, but the actual process of decoding the metaphor follows the pattern I lay out here.

³³ For the conceptual domain 'people are inanimate objects', R. W. Gibbs and D. Beitel, 'What Proverb Understanding Reveals about How People Think', *PsyBul* 118 (1995): 136. Lakoff and Turner operate with the inverse, 'inanimate objects are people', in their discussion of personification, *Cool Reason*, 72-75.

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This example appears satisfactory, and the diagnostic highlights the incongruity of supposing that humans are machines. In this respect, Jackendoff and Aaron show the intuitive appeal of the Lakoff model of metaphor. But, using the same diagnostic, the inadequacy of Lakoff's model emerges clearly with different data:

- a) *Metaphor* Yhwh is king.
- b) *Conceptual metaphor* Gods are kings.
- c) *Incongruity* Of course, gods are not actually kings, but if they were, you might say that Yhwh is king.

The diagnostic reveals that, on the Lakoff model of metaphor, describing Yhwh as king is highly incongruous. Reading Yhwh's kingship as metaphorical thus appears to be natural, just as Brettler and others have supposed. But, the incongruity depends entirely on the conceptual metaphor that governs the sentence 'Yhwh is king'.

The rule of specificity, which Lakoff suggests, offers marginal help in finding an adequate conceptual metaphor. Still, a more specific conceptual metaphor might be 'The god of Israel is a ruler'. Plugging this conceptual metaphor into the diagnostic works as follows:

- a) *Metaphor* Yhwh is king.
- b) *Conceptual metaphor* The god of Israel is a ruler.
- c) *Incongruity* Of course, the god of Israel is not actually a ruler, but if he were, you could say that Yhwh would be king over Israel.

If the definition of 'ruler' is 'a human exercising power', then the Lakoff model may be correct in flagging an incongruity between 'god of Israel' and 'ruler'. But the Hebrew Bible frequently and unmistakably depicts Yhwh as

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both a powerful overlord and a regal leader with actual authority, and any suggestion to the contrary borders on the absurd.³⁴

Incongruity is thus not a wholly reliable indication of a metaphor after all. Similarly, if ‘king’ is a man holding royal office, then an incongruity arises between ‘Yhwh’ and ‘king’. On this definition of ‘king’ some concepts clearly do not transfer to ‘Yhwh’. But the incomplete conceptual mapping no more invalidates seeing Yhwh as a king than seeing him as a ruler. Still, influenced by Lakoff, Brettler concludes that Yhwh’s kingship must be metaphorical, since ‘Yhwh is king’ involves an incomplete conceptual transfer.³⁵

On Brettler’s argument, then, Yhwh acts in a kingly fashion, but he is not truly king. But surely this reasoning begs the question ‘what is a king?’, a question tentatively answered below (§4). Lakoff rightly observes that a metaphor like ‘He is a machine’ communicates that ‘he’ should be understood in terms of ‘machine’, and this formula may be replicated to numerous sentences of the form ‘X is Y’. But the diagnostic shows that even with incongruity, sentences in the form ‘X is Y’ are not always metaphor. Admittedly, when the Hebrew Bible describes God as king, Yhwh’s kingship cannot mean the same as David’s. But both figures are still kings. There is thus an ambiguity in ‘God is king’ that the Lakoff model of metaphor cannot explain without evoking absurdities.

³⁴ E.g., Deut 32:36a ‘For Yhwh will judge his people...’. Psa 22:29 ‘For to Yhwh belongs kingship, and he shall rule the nations’. Isa 33:22 ‘For Yhwh is our judge. Yhwh is our lawgiver. Yhwh is our king. He will save us’.

³⁵ E.g., the matter of material wealth. While Yhwh may disburse wealth (e.g. Isa 60:17), he does not amass it. Human kings, however, hoarded and adored wealth (1Kgs 3:11).

2.2.2 Alternative

The flaws in the Lakoff model flag the need for an alternative understanding of linguistic incongruities in ‘X is Y’ sentences. Aaron helpfully proposes what he calls ‘conceptual ascription’. While appropriating the Lakoff insight that ‘X is Y’ sentences do transfer notions of X to Y, the advantage of Aaron’s conceptual ascription over Lakoff’s proposal is threefold, corresponding to the three challenges posited in the preceding section.

1) Conceptual ascription avoids the clumsiness of distinguishing between metaphors and metaphorical concepts. The arbitrariness of specifying the most basic conceptual metaphor is also averted. Thus, conceptual ascription is simple without being simplistic.

2) Conceptual ascription dissolves the rigid distinction between metaphorical and literal statements and thus accommodates ‘the natural elasticity of our conceptual structure’ rather than artificially constricting it.³⁶ The diagram below plots a foundational element of conceptual ascription: utterance transparency operates on a gradient schema.³⁷ The extremes of the diagram represent utterances of either ontological identity or absurdity. On the left end, the ‘X is Y’ sentence is tautological because X and Y have a one to one correspondence. On the far right the sentence is wholly nonsensical because X and Y have no correspondence. Utterances falling in the middle tend towards one side or the other. So, whereas Lakoff sees an utterance as

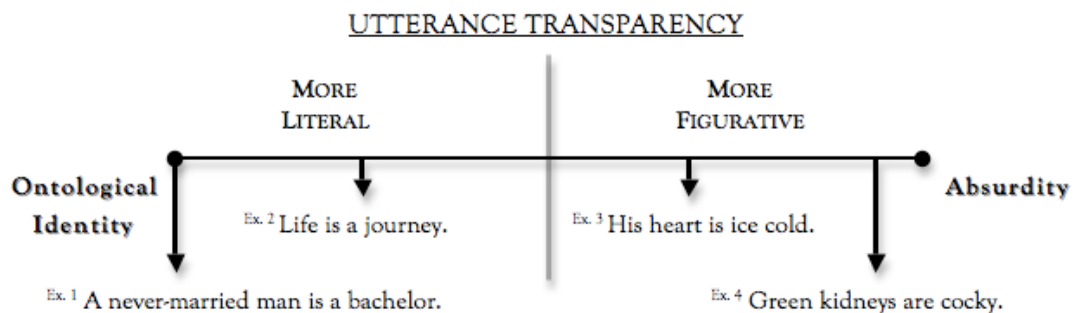
³⁶ Aaron, *Ambiguities*, 67.

³⁷ Engaging Aaron’s model, A. Moore (*Beyond Symbol*, 50) claims that ‘the issue is not the categorization of a statement as literal or metaphorical; it is recognition of the complexity and range of metaphorical expressions’. But this assertion is no argument; nor is Moore correct in her summary of Aaron’s ultimate concern. As here, literality or metaphoricalness is important, but a verdict depends on the prior issue (which Moore neglects) of what counts as a metaphor.

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either metaphorical or literal, this model allows a fluidity between literality and figurativeness. Figurativeness and literality inhere in an utterance by degrees or gradations so that any given utterance lands at some point along the gradient.

Example 1 epitomizes ‘ontological identity’: ‘A never-married man is a bachelor’. Example 2, ‘Life is a journey’, shows an utterance that may be considered more literal than figurative since movement and longevity typically characterize life. Whereas, in contrast, example 3 is more figurative than literal since few properties of coldness actually apply to a living heart: ‘His heart is ice cold’. Both examples 2 and 3 evidence *functional* conceptual ascription because X acts like Y in both, and thereby concepts of Y are ascribed to X. Example 4, of course, is nearly absurd since kidneys are purplish in colour, not green, and they lack any character traits.



3) Conceptual ascription deals with incongruities in ‘X is Y’ sentences without creating absurdities. In this way, conceptual ascription provides a solid framework for understanding sentences like ‘God is king’. The success of this model owes to a different linguistic foundation than the Lakoff model. The key insight of Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* concerned the transfer of concepts from one word to another in purported metaphors.

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However, as the above diagnostic highlighted, this insight is only partially successful in dealing with incongruities. At bottom, the problem with the Lakoff model stems from its assumption about conceptual transfer. To Lakoff, a metaphor occurs when a word or sentence registers in more than one conceptual domain, that is, ‘any coherent organization of experience’.³⁸

For example, language used to describe time often imitates spatial language; the conceptual domains of space and time share vocabulary. Thus ‘in the house’ and ‘in December’ are valid uses of ‘in’. Lakoff reckons that the shared use of ‘in’ indicates a conceptual metaphor, in this case, ‘time is a container’ since ‘in December’ can be decomposed into this conceptual metaphor. Thus, according to Lakoff, the sentence ‘Christmas is in December’ is metaphorical since December is not actually a container.³⁹ But, the diagnostic developed above challenges this judgment.

- a) ^{Metaphor} Christmas is in December.
- b) ^{Conceptual metaphor} Time is a container.
- c) ^{Incongruity} Of course, December is not actually a container, but if it were, you could say that Christmas was in it.

But, of course, Christmas is not in any other month. The Lakoff model is thus again problematic. In this case, the problem rests on the underlying assumption that a word in both the ‘time’ and ‘space’ domains must have a conceptual starting point, that is, that its linguistic use began in the space domain before migrating to the time domain.

³⁸ Kövecses, *Metaphor*, 4.

³⁹ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 59.

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As the linguist Ray Jackendoff argues, however, conceptual parallels do not require that one linguistic domain is derived from the other.⁴⁰ Thus, the preposition ‘in’ operates with equal legitimacy in both temporal and spatial domains without evoking a metaphor. The diagnostic above (§2.2.1) works because the brain functions with a basic set of abstractions that it applies variously across domains in order to make sense of linguistic phenomena.⁴¹ With the sentence ‘Christmas is in December’, Jackendoff’s reasoning explains that the brain applies the abstract concept of ‘in’ to the time domain. And ‘Christmas is in December’ is not metaphorical for the simple reason that there is no other way to communicate meaningfully that an event occurs during a certain time period except to use prepositions that function in both the spatial and temporal domains.⁴² Parallels between domains do not require a hierarchy of one domain over another. Consequently, cross-domain communication occurs without invoking metaphor.⁴³ Aaron’s notion of conceptual ascription draws on these insights from Jackendoff and thus better explains the mental activity that produces the linguistic concepts.

⁴⁰ R. Jackendoff, *Semantics and Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1983), 188-211.

⁴¹ Cf. Jackendoff, *Semantics*, 210. Contrast V. Haser, ‘Metaphor in Semantic Change’ in *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads: A Cognitive Perspective* (ed. A. Barcelona; TEL 30; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000), 176-187.

⁴² R. Jackendoff, *Languages of the Mind: Essays on Mental Representation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1992), 182-183.

⁴³ Although, Lakoff himself recognizes the possibility of cross-domain operation, he subsumes it under the broader theory of metaphor and thereby perpetuates the overextension and equivocal use of ‘metaphor’, G. Lakoff, ‘The Invariance Hypothesis: Is Abstract Reason Based on Image-Schemas?’, *CL 1* (1990): 39-74. Cf. Jackendoff, *Languages*, 177, n.4.

3. Applying the model

The Lakoff account of metaphor that Brettler uses to understand ‘Yhwh is king’ operates with binary categories of literal and metaphorical. However, in adapting Aaron’s model of conceptual ascription, the present study allows that utterances carry a degree of literality, as seen on the diagram above. On this account, an ‘X is Y’ sentence need not be understood as either wholly metaphorical or wholly literal. Rather, it may evoke both literal and metaphorical elements, depending on the strength of the incongruity between X and Y.⁴⁴

Admittedly, a single utterance’s precise location on the spectrum between ontological identity and absurdity may vary according to the perceptions of an individual reader. For example, the diagram above locates ‘life is a journey’ on the left of the spectrum, suggesting that ‘life’ and ‘journey’ are more congruous than incongruous. But not all readers will agree that ‘life is a journey’ is more literal than more figurative.⁴⁵ The location above is thus primarily heuristic and intended simply to convey the value of the conceptual ascription approach to ‘X is Y’ utterances. Any firm opinion on an utterance’s location requires studied attention, precisely what this study will undertake regarding ‘Yhwh is king’ in the book of Ezekiel.

⁴⁴ Soskice’s concern about the ‘dual truth’ problem does not apply here, *Metaphor*, 86.

According to conceptual ascription, every utterance acquires a single place on the spectrum of meaning, rather than occupying two points.

⁴⁵ Here ‘gradience’ is non-technical, in contrast to ‘gradience’ as now used in linguistics to refer to a component of the creation of new lexical and grammatical forms, e.g., J.L. McClelland and J. Bybee, ‘Gradience of Gradience: A Reply to Jackendoff’, *LR* 24 (2007): 437-455.

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At bottom, an utterance's location on the spectrum hinges largely on the congruence of its constitutive words. Explicating 'Yhwh is king' could, therefore, include semantic study of 'king' in the hopes that a more precise definition of 'king' would illuminate its congruence (or lack of congruence) with 'Yhwh'. A fundamental problem with the semantic approach, however, is that most words, like utterances of the 'X is Y' variety, are indeterminate. Put positively, the meaning of most words derives from meeting what linguists call 'typicality' conditions rather than necessary and sufficient conditions.⁴⁶ While some words may satisfy necessary and sufficient conditions (particularly binary concepts), the overwhelming majority do not.⁴⁷

Whereas 'necessary and sufficient conditions' refer to qualities that *must* be present in a given entity, 'typicality conditions' refer to qualities that *may* (and generally do) characterize something/someone. Ellen Spolsky explains that typicality conditions 'are the furniture of an experienced mind, which accepts conditions of meaning from a variety of sources'.⁴⁸ Distinguishing vague uses of a word (say, 'king') from more obvious cases is a matter of proportion, not binary value, just as the distinction between 'literal'

⁴⁶ Jackendoff rightly observes that recognising the role of typicality conditions does not eliminate necessary conditions but only shifts the primary focus in semantic theory, *Semantics*, 121. The classic treatment of truth-conditional semantics is A. Tarski, 'The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics', *PPR* 4 (1944): 341-376.

⁴⁷ Exceptions include familial relations; e.g., a brother is (literally) only a male sibling. J. Fodor, et al. explain the legitimacy of truth conditions for kinship terms and other specialized vocabulary while still seeing most words as tied to typicality conditions, 'Against Definitions', *Cognition* 8 (1980): 263-367. These types of words are still available for figurative use.

⁴⁸ E. Spolsky, *Gaps in Nature: Literary Interpretation and the Modular Mind* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1993), 47.

and ‘figurative’ is graded for utterances on the diagram above. Thus, Jackendoff rightly emphasizes that ‘fuzziness must not be treated as a defect in language; nor is a theory of language defective that countenances it. Rather...fuzziness is an inescapable characteristic of the concepts that language expresses’.⁴⁹

Affirming the fuzziness of language allows the acceptability of employing ‘typicality conditions’, which, in turn, enables clarification of utterance transparency. Though perhaps not consciously, human communication frequently resorts to typicality conditions in order to understand fuzzy terms. For example, meaningful communication about ‘dog’ regularly occurs in spite of the myriad variety of dogs, some that seem to stretch the limits of ‘dog’.⁵⁰ At first blush, ‘tail’, ‘fur’ and ‘quadruped’ seem to be necessary if not sufficient conditions for ‘dog’, but the absence of these characteristics does not ‘unmake’ a dog. Neither does their presence distinguish a dog from other animals.

A majority of dogs have all three characteristics, but, as ‘an experienced mind’ surely recognizes, some will have no tail (like the Belgian Schipperke), others will have no fur (like the Mexican Xoloitzcuintli), and still others have only three legs (like the mutt at Lochend Park).⁵¹ The cognitive structure of the brain adequately navigates the ambiguities of ‘dog’ by assessing the correspondence between the word ‘dog’ and the instantiations

⁴⁹ Jackendoff, *Semantics*, 117.

⁵⁰ Cf. Aaron, *Ambiguities*, 75.

⁵¹ On the first two breeds, L. Palika, *The Howell Book of Dogs: The Definitive Reference to 300 Breeds and Varieties* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2007), 316 and 389.

of dogs known to author and audience.⁵² The fuzzy edges of ‘dog’ do not prevent the brain from making sense of the world. To the contrary, fuzziness contributes to colourful and substantive visions of the world because it is intimately part of the fabric of human communication.

4. The model and kings

The experienced mind also sees that ‘king’ comprises many qualities and that the absence of individual qualities does not unmake a ‘king’. In the world of ancient Israel these qualities included the exercise of power, beneficence for subjects, protection of territory and engagement of foreign powers.⁵³ But the Hebrew Bible bears out exceptions to one or all of these conditions. For example, according to 2 Kings 25 and Ezekiel 1, Jehoiachin was a king even after being deposed to Babylon, but, as captive in Nebuchadnezzar’s court he bore none of the qualities noted above. Perhaps, were the argument pressed, he retained his royal title on account of his lineage. Kingship, after all, was a hereditary office.⁵⁴ But Jehu (2 Kings 9) and David (1 Sam 16:12) received a royal anointing in spite of common parentage. What is more, the Samuel narrative hails David as king concurrent with Saul’s reign over the people of Israel, even though David initially exercised no authority. Thus, in answer to

⁵² Again, linguistic theory correlates to mental processes, noting that, instead of black and white distinctions, the brain distinguishes smells, colours, sounds, textures and tastes on something of a grey spectrum. See F. Lerdahl and R. Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1983), 5-8.

⁵³ Cf. V.H. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250-587 BCE* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 159-175.

⁵⁴ With attention to the intricacies of this topic, T. Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (BZAW 142; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977).

the question posed above (§2.2.1), ‘what is a king’?, the Hebrew Bible offers varied answers.⁵⁵

Since necessary and sufficient conditions for ‘king’ are elusive, identifying Yhwh as a king may create less incongruity than commonly supposed. The flexibility of what counts as ‘king’ generates the possibility that ‘Yhwh is king’ occupies a left-of-centre position on the transparency spectrum above. For, if Jehoiachin merits designation as Judah’s monarch, in spite of his inability to discharge any royal duties, then Ezekiel’s identification of Yhwh as a royal figure who does perform the role of king merits consideration as participating within the political world of Jehoiachin and his captors. Acknowledging the validity of typicality conditions, ‘king’ may acceptably function as a predicate to ‘Yhwh’, even if it creates more cognitive pause than when affixed to ‘David’.

Conclusion

Brettler’s influential book on Yhwh’s kingship assumes a metaphorical stance toward the matter. He notes that ancient Israel’s neighbours saw no incompatibility between the office of human king and divine king, but then he also rejects out of hand the possibility of a similar view in Israel.⁵⁶ As seen

⁵⁵ The complexities of kingship in ancient Israel need no rehearsing here. Throughout this study relevant scholarship will be engaged as various facets of kingship arise in comparison or contrast with Yhwh’s own kingship. For now, a standard survey is K. W. Whitelam, ‘Israelite Kingship: The Royal Ideology and its Opponents’, in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study* (ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 119-139. More recently, M. Hamilton has explored a neglected facet of kingship, the physical description of the king, *The Body Royal: The Social Poetics of Kingship in Ancient Israel* (BibIntSer 78; Leiden: Brill, 2005).

⁵⁶ Cf. Brettler, *God is King*, 24.

above, Brettler's position derives from linguistic and theological commitments, but, while the theological issues lie beyond the present parameters, a terse tour of the relevant linguistic issues found the standard answers to be deficient. A new model, providing a truer understanding of how utterances such as 'Yhwh is king' obtain meaning, suggests that Yhwh's kingship is not metaphorical but open to gradations of literality and figurativeness.

The linguistic position advocated in this chapter forms a firm foundation for exploring whether Israel viewed Yhwh as a legitimate king who reigned concurrent with the human monarch.⁵⁷ In contrast to the Lakoff model Brettler employed, the schema introduced above permits a more nuanced conclusion than the binary options of metaphorical versus literal. Drawing on Aaron and Jackendoff, this is possible by recognizing that utterances fall along a gradient of transparency. Thus, though some qualities of 'king' imperfectly map onto 'Yhwh', hailing Yhwh as king is not necessarily a wholly figurative enterprise.

With its repeated assertions of Yhwh's kingship, the book of Ezekiel is a prime location for beginning this fresh approach to a common theme of the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁸ Chapters 3-8 now turn to this task, grounded upon a linguistic foundation that allows Ezekiel's royal depiction of Yhwh to convey

⁵⁷ As anticipated in O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 35.

⁵⁸ Suggesting a wider value for the reappraisal of metaphor in Ezekiel, K. Schöpflin has identified several other images and themes in Ezekiel as metaphors, including the shepherd motif in Ezekiel 34, 'The Composition of Metaphorical Oracles within the Book of Ezekiel', *VT* 55 (2005): 101-120. But, space constraints prevent an adequate response beyond what is proposed here.

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far more than transcendent imagery. Nevertheless, while challenging the underpinnings of Brettler's important contribution, it would be difficult to better Brettler's investigation of the intricacies of kingship. So, even if not named in each instance, Brettler's method will feature prominently, in short, identifying attribution of royalty to Yhwh by considering how comparable facets of kingship function in the human realm. Going beyond Brettler, Chapter 3 will begin to locate 'Yhwh is king' on the scale of utterance transparency by evaluating the Yhwh's kingship within Ezekiel 1-5.

Chapter 3—Seeing the King (Ezekiel 1-5)

1. Introduction

In Ezek 1:26-28, a dazzling figure seated upon a mystifying throne appears to the prophet Ezekiel.¹ Although brief, this scene is like a stone thrown into a calm lake, sending royal ripples across Ezekiel 1-5 so that these chapters radiate Yhwh's kingship. The passage, especially Ezekiel 1, has long fascinated readers of the Hebrew Bible (or its Greek translations).² Recent years have uncovered numerous insights about its (likely) background.³ However, in spite of ample attention, consensus about even its main features is lacking, as suggested by Leslie Allen's catalogue of nine opinions on the structure of Ezekiel 1 alone.⁴ Another look at Ezekiel 1 is in order.

¹ Although Hebrew כִּסֵּא does refer to an ordinary chair (e.g., Judg 4:5), the common sense is 'throne', the seat of royalty. For thorough discussion, A. Salvesen, 'כִּסֵּא' in *Semantics of Ancient Hebrew* (ed. T. Muraoka; AbrNSup 6; Louvain: Peeters, 1998), 44-65. Whatever the origin of the throne as a royal emblem, its ubiquitous power is attested across the ancient world that birthed Ezekiel's vision, as discussed and depicted in M. Metzger, *Königsthron und Gottesthron: Thronformen und Throndarstellungen in Ägypten und im Vorderen Orient im dritten und zweiten Jahrtausend vor Christus und deren Bedeutung für das Verständnis von Aussagen über den Thron im Alten Testament* (2 vols.; AOAT 15; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1985).

² For early Christian treatments, A.R. Christman, 'What Did Ezekiel See?' *Christian Exegesis of Ezekiel's Vision of the Chariot from Irenaeus to Gregory the Great* (BAC 4; Leiden: Brill, 2005). For Jewish, D.J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (TSAJ 16; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 63-358.

³ E.g., C. Uehlinger and S.M. Trufaut, 'Ezekiel 1, Babylonian Cosmological Scholarship and Iconography: Attempts at Further Refinement', *ThZ* 57 (2001): 140-171.

⁴ L. Allen, 'The Structure and Intention of Ezekiel 1', *VT* 43 (1993): 145-161. More recently, K. Nielsen offered another take on the 'message' of the chapter after registering disappointment with four competing views, 'Ezekiel's Visionary Call as Prologue: From Complexity and Changeability to Order and Stability?', *JSOT* 33 (2008): 99-114.

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The vision's portrayal of Yhwh's kingship has suffered particular neglect, primarily receiving treatment as a subsidiary feature of the pericope introducing the prophet Ezekiel.⁵ Walther Zimmerli's landmark commentary representatively entitles Ezek 1:1-3:15 'The Call' and concludes that the primary aim of the passage is to reveal the word of Yhwh through the prophet Ezekiel.⁶ In Zimmerli's defense, only three verses (1:26-28) explicitly state a royal theme. And, what is more, the book of Ezekiel naturally reads as a narrative of the prophet's experience, due to the first-person statements littering the book.⁷

However, as seen below (§3), scrutiny of Ezekiel 1 shows that 1:26-28 are the narrative's centrepiece and that all of Ezekiel 1 builds to the climactic depiction of Israel's deity as a king in 1:26-28. The remainder of the opening vision is the dénouement exposing the implications of Yhwh's kingship. Joyce has called Ezekiel the 'most God-centred of biblical books'.⁸ But this book equally revolves around the person of the prophet who purportedly presents a firsthand account of encounters with Yhwh. Only as a reader embraces

⁵ Quite exceptionally, K.P. Sullivan misses Yhwh's kingship altogether by identifying the figure on the throne as an angel, *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (AGJU 55; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 60-61.

⁶ W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* (trans. R.E. Clements and J.D. Martin; 2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979, 1983), 1.139.

⁷ Mayfield has recently presented a forceful argument for reading the whole of Ezekiel as a narrative, *Literary Structure*, 84-117. Cf. the undertones of W. Zimmerli, 'The Special Form and Tradition-Historical Character of Ezekiel's Prophecy', VT 15 (1965): 522-23.

⁸ Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 241.

both poles of this tension can the dynamics of the text emerge, resulting in a truer appreciation of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel.

After recognizing the centrality of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel, an analysis of the surrounding context is essential for understanding its breadth. Traditional boundaries of this larger unit are initially easy to identify. After all, the opening of the pericope is clear, since following a date formula, the book begins with the ominous words, 'the heavens were opened, and I saw a divine vision (מראות אלהים)'.⁹ And the pericope logically closes at 3:15 because there the prophet identifies the vision's conclusion. However, acknowledging Zimmerli's spadework, Margaret Odell demurs that Ezek 1:1-3:15 does not fit the tidy confines of call narrative.¹⁰

Without restating Odell's whole argument, her point is transparent: the second interaction between Yhwh and the prophet (3:16-5:17) belongs in a tight literary relationship with the initial vision because of strong narrative links.¹¹ Against Odell's argument, the formulaic notice of 3:22—'the hand of Yhwh was upon me there'—opens a distinct vision.¹² But its consonance with

⁹ Here following D.I. Block in translating מראות אלהים as 'divine vision' rather than the customary 'visions of God', *Ezekiel* (2 vols.; NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997-1998), 84-85.

¹⁰ M.S. Odell, 'You Are What You Eat: Ezekiel and the Scroll', *JBL* 117 (1998): 229-248 in parallel to M.S. Odell, *Ezekiel* (SHBC; Macon, Ga.: Smyth and Helwys, 2005), 53-55.

¹¹ Following Odell's coherent reading of Ezekiel 1-5 need not reflect a commitment to her genre decision that Ezekiel 1-5 build on Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. For genre in Ezekiel, M. Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (FAT 45; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 125-172. More comprehensively, T. Kent, *Interpretation and Genre: The Role of Generic Perception in the Study of Narrative Texts* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University, 1986).

¹² M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel* (2 vols.; AB 22-22a; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983, 1997), 1.82, 117-119.

and even integration into the first vision supports reading it in conjunction with Ezekiel 1:1-3:15. Common opinion also holds that 3:16-21, for example, is an insertion added to presage the watchman motif in 33:1-19.¹³ Yet while the enterprise of editorial criticism is valuable, as noted in Chapter 1, the primary textual basis for this project is the MT of Ezekiel as it stands. Periodically, as needed, emendations or evidence from the versions may prove valuable but only with clear rationale.¹⁴

The upshot, then, is that major obstacles to reading Ezekiel 1-5 as a single unit fall away. If Ezekiel 1-5 constitute a single textual unit, then the ripples of Yhwh's kingship persist beyond the traditional boundary of 3:15. The watchman pericope of 3:16-21 as well as the vision and divine speech regarding sign-acts (3:22-5:17) also fall easily under the shadow of the divine throne.¹⁵ Accordingly, a thorough exploration of Yhwh's kingship will countenance the whole of Ezekiel 1-5 as the book's introductory and programmatic salvo announcing Yhwh's kingship and its ramifications.

2. The form of the king

Unpacking Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel 1-5 depends first upon answering an objection that threatens to upend the project before it advances further.

¹³ E.g., K. W. Carley, 'an editor has introduced 3:16b-21 at this point to invest Ezekiel's later role with the same authority as his initial call', *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (CBC; Cambridge: CUP, 1974), 26.

¹⁴ M. Greenberg, 'What Are Valid Criteria for Determining Inauthentic Matter in Ezekiel?', in *EHB*, 123-135.

¹⁵ Cf. Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality*, 132, suggesting also that Ezekiel 6-7 fall into the opening pericope. Like his protégé, Mayfield (*Literary Structure*), Sweeney sees the date formulae of Ezekiel as structuring the book, an idea deserving of more attention than currently practicable.

Many scholars have recognized the oddity of the enthroned deity appearing in a foreign land.¹⁶ Dale Launderville identifies this disjunction as communicating Yhwh's transcendence and supremacy in the face of the crushing destruction Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon wrought upon Judah and her temple.¹⁷ What is more, Launderville contends that Ezekiel 1 aims to persuade an exilic audience to 'interiorize' Yhwh's kingship, that is to accept Yhwh's kingship as spiritual and abstract in light of the national devastation they have experienced. The exalted imagery and language of approximation enable Ezekiel to portray Yhwh in such highly figurative terms that the reader (or listener) would recognize Yhwh's kingship as no longer bearing on the state of Israel but as focused on the hearts of the faithful.

To support his argument for an abstract kingship, Launderville claims that in Ezekiel 1 'likeness' (דְּמוּת) carries the sense of an abstract comparison, as opposed to a concrete similitude.¹⁸ But on this point Launderville overstates his case by relying too heavily on the lexical evidence mounted by Horst Preuss. In short, Preuss's analysis too strongly emphasizes the link between 'likeness' and the corresponding verb 'to be like, resemble' (דָּמָה).¹⁹ Preuss argues that since the verb sometimes denotes a mental process, this so-called

¹⁶ Including W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (trans. C. Quin; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1970), 58 and J. T. Strong, 'God's *Kābôd*: The Presence of Yahweh in the Book of Ezekiel', in *BETAP*, 69-95.

¹⁷ D. Launderville, 'Ezekiel's Throne Chariot Vision: Spiritualizing the Model of Divine Royal Rule', *CBQ* 66 (2004): 361-377.

¹⁸ Launderville, 'Ezekiel's Throne Chariot', 364.

¹⁹ H.D. Preuss, 'דָּמָה—*damah*', *TDOT*, 3:250-60.

abstract sense transfers to the derivative noun (דְמוּת) in Ezekiel 1.²⁰ However, the dangers of etymologizing are well known and need no repeating here.²¹ More importantly, ‘likeness’ is semantically slippery, as exemplified in its most famous occurrence, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’ (Gen 1:26).²² Many scholars invest this instance of ‘likeness’ with an abstract quality.²³ But, other scholars allow that even here the term may connote something physical.²⁴

Such is certainly the case when 2 Kgs 16:10 reports a ‘likeness’ of a Syrian altar, though here the gloss ‘model’ is more descriptive.²⁵ Equally, Isaiah describes Yhwh’s army preparing for battle as ‘a sound of tumult in the mountains, like (דְמוּת) many people’ (Isa 13:14). Here דְמוּת enables the comparison between the noise of Yhwh’s teeming troops and something more familiar or evocative, a bustling crowd. In this sense, then, the word דְמוּת

²⁰ As in Psa 48:10 when faithful worshippers profess, ‘Oh God, we have pondered (דְמוּת) your steadfast love’. Cf. Judg 20:5, Esth 4:13, Isa 10:7, Psa 50:21.

²¹ Cf. J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 294.

²² For a recent survey of important literature, A. Schüle, ‘Made in the “Image of God”: Concepts of Divine Images in Gen 1-3’, *ZAW* 117 (2005): 9, n.22.

²³ Among others, J.F.A. Sawyer, ‘The Meaning of בְצִלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים (In the Image of God) in Genesis I-XI’, *JTS* 25 (1974): 418-426.

²⁴ Especially A. Angerstorfer, ‘Hebräisch *dmwt* und aramäisch *dmw(t)*: ein Sprachproblem der Imago-Dei-Lehre’, *BN* 24 (1984): 30-43. On identifying the referent of that physical something, R. Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).

²⁵ Here Preuss grants only that דְמוּת is ‘relatively concrete’, ‘דְמוּת—*damah*’, 3:257. Cf. M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation* (AB 11; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 189.

actually facilitates a more understandable or concrete description of what Isaiah saw. Abstraction is no more present here than when Psa 1:3 states that the man delighting in Yhwh's law is 'like a tree'. The man and tree are not ontologically identical; the sentence 'a man is a tree' may even fall on the far right of the transparency spectrum presented in Chapter 2. But abstraction is out of the picture.

The ten instances of 'likeness' in Ezekiel 1 resonate with the nuances seen in the examples above. For example, the living creatures have a likeness 'with the appearance of burning coals' (v. 13). Daniel Block sees the junction of 'likeness' and 'appearance' (מראה) as a doubly vague description of the creatures, as if Ezekiel were groping for words.²⁶ While predicating a psychological state to the author of Ezekiel 1 treads dangerous ground, Block's suggestion has merit. In the examples above, דמות denotes a definite object, albeit a model or representation of something else.²⁷ Thus, 'likeness' in v. 13 more likely refers to the creatures' form, that is, their physical shape and structure. The use of דמות in vv. 5 and 10 confirms this, as Ezekiel describes the creatures having the דמות of a human. Here, however, he does not reference the creatures' appearance. The narrative analysis sketched below (§3) suggests that Ezekiel only noted the creatures' appearance (v. 13) after he had already noted their form (vv. 5 and 10). Or, put differently, after grappling

²⁶ D.I. Block, 'Text and Emotion: A Study in the "Corruptions" in Ezekiel's Inaugural Vision (Ezekiel 1:4-28)', *CBQ* 50 (1988): 429. Also, Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 75.

²⁷ Cf. BDB, 198a. The abstract sense of 'substance' enters the spectrum extrabiblically, as noted by DCH, 2:449, citing 4QShirShab^f 23 2:9.

with what the creatures resembled in shape, the prophet took in the specifics of their appearance. Likewise, he mentions both the ‘form’ (דמות) and the appearance of the wheels (v. 16), of the glittering platform (v. 22) and of the throne (v. 26).²⁸

When the prophet finally concentrates on the centre of the storm cloud, he follows the same pattern in describing the figure occupying the throne (v. 26): ‘And upon the form of the throne was a form (דמות) like the appearance (כמראה) of a man’. Though vague, this description is not abstract.²⁹ The subsequent verses narrow the focus and add details to the appearance of the man-like figure, undoubtedly emphasizing the non-humanness of the figure but also specifying his concrete attributes: his seated position on the throne, his brilliance and the shimmering glow surrounding him. Yhwh’s kingship is not merely a spiritual phenomenon. To be sure, the prophet’s first glimpse of the king is embedded within the language of approximation. But attentiveness to the nuances of that language shows that Launderville’s suggestion of abstraction is unlikely since the likenesses described in the vision refer to concrete (albeit visional) realities.³⁰ Nevertheless, the

²⁸ Cf. M. Odell, ‘Ezekiel Saw What he Saw What He Said He Saw: Genres, Forms, and the Vision of Ezekiel 1’, in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (M.A. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 170.

²⁹ Nor is it likely that the similitude and the grammatical infelicities of Ezekiel 1 illustrate human speech that has not been transformed by God, *pace* D.C. Fredericks, ‘Diglossia, Revelation and Ezekiel’s Inaugural Rite’, *JETS* 41 (1998): 189-199.

³⁰ In Launderville’s vein, J. Middlemas sees Ezekiel as advocating a stringent form of aniconic Yahwism, arguing that the ‘[d]ivine effulgence as a rainbow immediately deconstructs Yahweh in human form’ (319), as does the vision’s imprecise language, ‘Exclusively Yahweh: Aniconism and Anthropomorphism in Ezekiel’ in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the*

significance of this vision cannot be extracted merely from its vocabulary; the narrative analysis in the next section provides further insight.

3. The narrative of kingship

Too often analyses of Ezekiel 1 leave the figure upon the throne tangled amidst the complicated visional narrative while attending to what Ezekiel's opening vision may say about the calling of the prophet. A more adequate assessment begins with attention to the narrative flow, for, as hinted in §1 above, Ezekiel 1-5 (indeed the whole book) reads as a narrative of the prophet's encounters with Yhwh. Admittedly, this tack sidesteps the vexing structural issues flagged above, but a different focus need not clash with structural readings so much as supplement them.

3.1 Perspective

Among its class, Ezekiel 1 is distinct for its attention to the prophet's own experience.³¹ Jeremiah 1 narrates a dialogue between deity and prophet in the space of sixteen verses. Isaiah 6 more closely parallels Ezekiel 1 on account of its orientation to the prophet's own perspective, but after only eight verses, Yhwh's commanding presence interrupts Isaiah's report.³² In contrast, the

Oxford Old Testament Seminar (ed. J. Day; LHBOTS 531; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 309-324. But, imprecise language renders the vision of Yhwh vague, not unintelligible; the prophet still has seen a representation of Yhwh. The rainbow-like sight refers not to the figure on the throne but to the entire complex of sights that is dubbed 'the glory of Yhwh', shorthand for referring to the divine presence, not Yhwh himself. Cf. §4.4 below.

³¹ Cf. the classic study of prophetic calls, N. Habel, 'The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives', *ZAW* 77 (1965): 297-323.

³² M. Nobile even reads Isaiah 6 as the seedbed for Ezekiel 1-3, 'Jes 6 und Ez 1,1 - 3,15: Vergleich und Funktion im jeweiligen redaktionellen Kontext', in *The Book of Isaiah-Le livre d'Isaïe: les oracles et leurs relecteurs: unité et complexité de l'ouvrage* (ed. J. Vermeylen; BETL 131; Leuven: Leuven University, 1989), 209-216.

initial narrative of Ezekiel's first encounter with Yhwh tops its counterparts at twenty-eight verses.³³ Following the formulaic opening,³⁴ the narrative of divine encounter in Ezekiel 1 only advances with the prophet's autobiographical speech, that is, with first-person *wayyiqtol* verbs.³⁵ Only in 2:1 does Yhwh speak. All of Ezekiel 1, then, showcases the prophet's own perspective.³⁶ Though perhaps obvious, this feature bears discussion in order to clarify the significance of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel 1-5.

The formulaic opening includes the detail 'the heavens were opened'. The prophet then begins his tale, 'And I saw (וַיַּרְאֵהָ) divine visions', in essence informing the reader that as the heavens opened he recognized that the sight before him was an appearance of the divine. Until v. 15, successive verses tell the story of that appearance, driven by a complex verbal texture that alternates between *wayyiqtol* verbs advancing the narrative and other verbal forms explaining what the prophet saw at each stage of the vision. The net effect is that the reader inhabits the prophet's eyes, seeing what he saw as he saw it. As the prophet's eyes flit, the reader hears 'and I saw', and as his eyes

³³ Leading Pohlmann to label the vision 'an advanced stage of Israelite theophany', *Hesekiel/Ezekiel*, 61.

³⁴ On the opening verb וַיַּרְאֵהָ, Block, *Ezekiel*, 1.80-82.

³⁵ On the *wayyiqtol* form, Joüon-Muraoka, §118.

³⁶ The verb וַיַּרְאֵהָ ('And there was') in v. 25 appears to threaten this argument, since the subject is not the narrator. However, with Zimmerli (*Ezekiel* 1.88) and the majority, one may reject the entire verse as an irrelevant insertion. Or, with Block (*Ezekiel* 1.102, n.88) one may opt for the *lectio difficilior* on the grounds that the verse clarifies the thought begun in v. 24 but does not develop the narrative flow.

linger, the reader obtains vivid detail of what the prophet saw. Initially (only in vv. 4, 15) the narrative advances slowly as after the report ‘I saw’ (וַיֵּרְא), the narrative spins out to specify the visual experience. In other words, after the narrative verb in vv. 4 and 15, the subsequent statements state exactly what Ezekiel saw, and the narrative does not advance until the account of the visual experience has concluded.

This means that the verbs in vv. 5-14 and vv. 16-23 all assume the narrative claim ‘I saw’. For example, in v. 14 Ezekiel states that ‘the living creatures dashed back and forth like the appearance of lightning’. The verbs describing the creatures’ frenetic activity are subordinate to the narrative action of Ezekiel’s vision and only merit mention because it was what the prophet saw. If the narrator had intended to describe the creatures’ movements as discrete actions in a series of events, he would have used *wayyiqtol* forms rather than the infinitival forms.³⁷

Similarly, participial forms occur when a perfect or *wayyiqtol* would have sufficed, as in v. 4. There, as the vision commences, Ezekiel states that a ‘a storm wind was coming (בָּאָה) from the north’. The participle בָּאָה, rather than the *wayyiqtol* וַיָּבֹא as in 2:2 indicates that the rise of the storm occurred within the vision, rather than as a distinct event in addition to the vision. These representative examples illustrate that Ezekiel 1 is a narrative of what the prophet experienced.³⁸ Yet as seen in the next section, this literary touch

³⁷ Cf. the infinitives in v. 21, ‘When they moved (בִּלְכָהֶם), the wheels moved, and when they stood (וַיַּעֲמֻדוּ), the wheels stood, and when they rose above the earth (וַיִּשְׁאֲרוּ), the wheels rose up’.

³⁸ The prolific use of similes also evidences a preoccupation with the narrator’s sensory experience so that the narrative weight falls firmly on the prophet’s shoulders, e.g., in v. 13

finds its telos in highlighting not the prophet's experience but the shimmering figure that the prophet sees. Here is the tension between prophet and Yhwh noted above (§1).

3.2 Focus

The narrowing of the vision's focus further suggests that Ezekiel 1 is a vehicle for presenting the prophet's experience of the deity-king.³⁹ The theophany opens with an expansive perspective, as the prophet initially reports seeing a brilliant storm cloud approaching from the north. He soon isolates the central features of the cloud, including something with 'the appearance of electrum' (v. 4). He also sees the living creatures and then describes them in detail, including their sounds. The account continues until the prophet's eyes settle upon the gleaming centre of the cloud, distinguishing a human-like figure as the electrum-like object (v. 27) that he saw in v. 4.⁴⁰

The final narrowing of the prophet's gaze draws the opening narrative to a climactic close, as, after detailing the features of the figure, the prophet unleashes a verbal staccato: 'And I saw (וַיֵּרְאֵהָ). And I fell on my face (וַיִּפֹּל). And I heard (וַיִּשְׁמַע) a voice speaking.' Here is a verbal red carpet unrolled to

describing the creatures as 'like burning coals of fire', and 'like the appearance of torches' and in v. 24, seeming to fumble for an adequate resemblance for the creatures' wings. At first, the noise is 'like the sound of many waters', then 'like the voice/sound of Shadday', and finally 'a sound of tumult, like the sound of an army'.

³⁹ R. Wilson noted the narrowing but missed the implication, 'Prophecy in Crisis: The Call of Ezekiel', *Int* 38 (1984): 122-123.

⁴⁰ The word glossed 'electrum' (הַחֶמֶל) occurs only in 1:4, 1:27 and 8:2. D. Bodi plausibly roots חֶמֶל in the Akkadian *elmēšu* that denotes either the gleaming, gold-silver alloy known as 'electrum' or amber, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra* (OBO 104; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 82-94.

greet the divine king; with the chain of verbs, the narrative spotlight abruptly turns upon Yhwh. He, not the prophet, now assumes (and maintains) centre stage for the remainder of the book. Though the prophet does speak again, the following forty-seven chapters deny him a monologue like in Ezekiel 1. The king's brilliant appearing steals the show.

The first verb, 'I saw' (וַיֵּרְאֵהָ), is crucial for understanding the significance of the verbal catena in v. 27. Its final letter (ה) signals the end of the prophet's introductory report, forming an *inclusio* with the only other instance of this precise verbal form (v. 1).⁴¹ From one angle, Ezekiel's awe-inspired prostration flows out of reverence for the entire collage of sights in the vision, since he terms the whole 'the glory of Yhwh' (v. 28).⁴² However, he has already reported things that did not provoke the dramatic action of falling on his face. Here, he launches himself to the dust only after seeing the magnificent, quasi-anthropomorphic Yhwh. So, from another angle, the rapid succession of narrative verbs that follows the description of Yhwh suggests that the prophet's sudden obeisance owes primarily to his vision and recognition of the brilliant figure on the brilliant throne. Upon realizing that he had seen the god of Israel in royal splendour, Ezekiel fell prostrate. The

⁴¹ Cf. Allen, 'Structure and Intention', 148. In vv. 4, 15, and 27 the other instances of the verb are apocapated (וַיֵּרְאֵהָ) and occur elsewhere (without a prefix) in Ezekiel at 23:13 and 44:4. The plene form occurs next at 2:9, suggesting that its presence here is a deliberate contrast to the shortened forms earlier in the chapter.

⁴² N. Sarna explains the Hebrew כְּבוֹד יְהוָה as 'multifaceted in meaning, its precise signification determined by context', *Exodus* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 87. The standard gloss 'glory of Yhwh' is thus often insufficient. Still, for convenience, this thesis generally maintains the typical gloss.

verbose descriptions of the earlier narrative are absent as the grandeur of the figure overwhelms the prophet.

In a book noted for its theocentricity, the opening narrative appears potentially misplaced. But a close analysis shows otherwise. While vv. 1-28a could pass as a mere record of the prophet's experience, the figure on the throne in v. 28b indicates that the preceding verses are no less than an elaborate technique for introducing the book of Ezekiel's main character, Yhwh, the king.

4. Transcendence

If the language of approximation in Ezekiel 1 does not convey the merely spiritual reality supposed by Launderville, what sort of reign does Ezekiel 1 (and Ezekiel 2-5) expect? No doubt the ramifications of Yhwh's kingship affect the 'spirituality' of his people, as indicated by the motif of the people's heart.⁴³ But Yhwh's reign reaches beyond the interior of his people's lives to every facet of their physical existence. As discussed below, two themes relevant to Yhwh's kingship emerge from closer study of Ezekiel 1, the king's transcendence and his military prowess. Now the ripples of Yhwh's kingship begin to roll, and, as seen here and throughout the remainder of this thesis, Yhwh's kingship is less a stone thrown into a lake than a boulder rolled into a pond. Its affect is enormous and inescapable, both for the book's early readers and (when seen rightly) its interpreters today.

4.1 Location

Ezekiel's location near a Babylonian waterway occurs in v. 1 (and 3:15) for good reason; it is integral to the argument of the whole book, including the

⁴³ As in 2:3, 3:7, 11:19, 14:3-5, 18:31, 36:25, 44:9.

presentation of Yhwh as king.⁴⁴ An encounter with Yhwh in a foreign land exploded expectations and exposed a fresh perspective on Yhwh's identity, since the Hebrew Bible consistently exalts the Jerusalem temple as the earthly locus of Yhwh's rule.⁴⁵ So, while Greenberg rightly protests that a universally powerful Yhwh is hardly unique to Ezekiel, the experience depicted in Ezekiel 1 certainly defied ordinary assumptions about Yhwh.⁴⁶ Rather than bound to the Jerusalem temple, Yhwh is free. Since Ezekiel identifies Yhwh chiefly as a king, it is no leap to suppose that Yhwh's royal jurisdiction overflows the borders of national Judah.⁴⁷

John Strong, however, objects that the vision of Yhwh's throne is not an assertion but an anticipation of Yhwh's kingship since, 'at the time of the exile Yahweh was not ruling the earthly corner of the cosmos'. To Strong, the appearances of the divine presence ('glory of Yhwh') in Ezekiel 1-5 and 8-11 indicate that Yhwh was returning from his heavenly quarters 'to fight and to

⁴⁴ Among others, B. Oded notes that several cuneiform texts report several irrigation canals near Babylon named *Nar Kabaru*, cognate to Hebrew נַהַר-כַּבָּר ('Chebar canal'), 'Israelite and Judean Exiles in Mesopotamia', in *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography* (ed. G. Galil and M. Weinfeld; VTSup 85; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 100.

⁴⁵ The relationship between Ezekiel and other traditions of the Hebrew Bible generates ongoing debate that will be largely sidelined (here and elsewhere) due to the focus of this thesis. Thus, the question of how the 'glory of Yhwh' in Ezekiel relates to a priestly theology of divine presence receives little discussion here. For contrasting accounts, T.N.D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (trans. F.H. Cryer; ConBOT 18; Lund: Gleerup, 1982), 106-115 and S.S. Tuell, 'Divine Presence and Absence in Ezekiel's Prophecy', in *BETAP*, 97-116. Also, §4.4 below.

⁴⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.59.

⁴⁷ As many have posited, e.g., R.E. Clements, *Ezekiel* (Louisville: WJK, 1996), 11-15.

reclaim this territory’.⁴⁸ Indeed in Ezekiel 1-5, the theme of rebellion (§6.1 below) supports a view of Yhwh’s kingship engaged in battle. He has come to fight, but not because he has failed to rule so much as because his people, like vassals against an overlord, have rebelled and must be subdued.⁴⁹ In appearing to the prophet in Babylon, Yhwh demonstrates that he rules not only Judah but also Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar may be the human king appointed by the divine Marduk, but Yhwh flouts geographical boundaries because his right to rule trumps all other claimants to the throne.

4.2 Origin

The northern origin of the storm cloud also suggests Yhwh’s transcendence. Here, the north signifies the mythic abode of the gods, or, as Eichrodt puts it, ‘the divine dwelling place which lies inconceivably far away’.⁵⁰ From this place, Yhwh arrives to confront earthly affairs. Though thoroughly engaged in the human sphere, Yhwh is not of it because he is ‘from the north’. Not surprisingly, this mythological sense has its detractors.⁵¹ Block, for example, explains ‘the north’ as the actual direction from which the wind blew on the

⁴⁸ Strong, ‘God’s *Kābôd*’, 89.

⁴⁹ To my knowledge, the thematic overlap between Yhwh and his people and Nebuchadnezzar and the Judeans has yet to be explored.

⁵⁰ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 59. For further bibliography, J. Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (JSOTSup 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 107, n.30.

⁵¹ Allen [*Ezekiel* (2 vols; WBC 28-29; Dallas: Word, 1990, 1994), 1.25] takes ‘north’ as a poetic synonym for ‘heavens’, citing Job 26:7 where ‘Yhwh stretches the north over the void; he hangs the earth upon nothing’. But even here ‘the north’ likely acquires a mythic sense, S. Balentine, *Job* (SHBC; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 388.

day of Ezekiel's vision.⁵² But this is unlikely because it fails to maintain the distinction between Ezekiel's physical reality and visional reality. His physical reality was Mesopotamia, but 'the wind from the north' was only visional. If not, then one must admit the bright cloud, the living creatures, and the whole of the vision as potentially visible to Ezekiel's contemporaries. Further, as argued above, from the perspective of the narrative, Ezekiel has already transferred his sight from the physical to the visional world when he sees 'a stormy wind'.

What is more, similar instances support at least an attenuated mythological sense of 'from the north' in Ezek 1:4. In Job 37:22, Elihu poetically links God to the north: 'From the north comes golden brightness; God is clothed in awesome splendour'.⁵³ In order to make sense of this couplet, 'awesome splendour' must parallel 'golden brightness'. This allows that, just as 'golden brightness' originates in the north, so does the 'awesome splendour' of God. In turn, then, the parallelism urges seeing 'the north' as endowed with mythological value and not simply a metonymy for 'the heavens'.⁵⁴ The next verse confirms this, saying of Yhwh, 'We cannot find the Almighty; he is great in power' (Job 37:23). The mysterious, mythological north hides Yhwh and heightens the sense of his otherness.

⁵² Block, *Ezekiel*, 1.92. Cf. Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.42-43.

⁵³ This rendering of MT זָהָב ('gold') makes redundant an emendation to יָהָר ('brightness'), *pace* S.R. Driver, *The Book of Job in the Revised Version* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), 112.

⁵⁴ J. Hartley, *Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 484. Cf. Job 26:7.

Chapter 3—Seeing the King

In Isa 14:13, Yhwh mocks the king of Babylon for planning to elevate his throne to the ‘mountain of assembly, to the remote parts of the north’.⁵⁵ But, as the whole oracle makes clear, only Yhwh legitimately resides in the north, for he alone is mighty. Not even the king of Babylon compares to Yhwh. A similar sense is clear in Psa 48:3, as the psalmist locates the city of Yhwh, ‘the great King’, in the ‘remote parts of the north’. The psalm expounds Yhwh’s kingliness while militant kings approach Yhwh’s fortress city only to flee in panic and astonishment, presumably because the city embodies the grandeur and strength of its king.⁵⁶

An initial reading of ‘the north’ in both Isa 14:13 and Ps 48:3 allows for more than a geographical designation, but, seen within their larger contexts, this mere possibility becomes a likelihood. These passages marshal ‘the north’ to express Yhwh’s power and otherness, and the analogy with Ezek 1:4 is striking. Indeed, in lieu of superior explanations, Yhwh’s origin in Ezekiel 1 should be viewed as mythologically significant. The parallels with Isaiah 14 and Psalm 48 strongly suggest the possibility that Ezekiel’s vision of Yhwh trades in the mythological notion of the north as the divine abode. As such, the small phrase ‘from the north’ magnifies Ezekiel’s picture of Yhwh’s kingship. The mythological north heightens the transcendence of this king so that he commands unswerving respect.⁵⁷ None is like Yhwh the king.

⁵⁵ For recent, relevant discussion see, Day, *Gods and Goddesses*, 166-184.

⁵⁶ MT has only ‘the kings’, but three LXX texts (A, L, and R) read these as ‘the kings of the earth’ perhaps evoking Ps 2:2 where ‘the kings of the earth’ advance against Yhwh. Cf. Psa 76:13.

⁵⁷ For Ezekiel’s varied use of this motif, Chapter 4, §3.1.

4.3 The living creatures

The living creatures that feature so prominently in Ezekiel 1 may also speak to Yhwh's transcendence, depending on their identity. In a disputed piece of intertextuality, Ezekiel 10 identifies the living creatures of Ezekiel 1 as cherubim, and, as discussed in Chapter 4, the cherubim do contribute to Ezekiel's conception of Yhwh's royalty. However, Ezekiel 1 conspicuously omits mention of cherubim, and even if John Wevers is correct to opine that 'the original text was much shorter', the complicated literary relationship between Ezekiel 1 and 10 suggests that at some point the creatures could have been identified as cherubim in Ezekiel 1.⁵⁸ The present stance of the text is likely quite deliberate. So, reading Ezekiel 1 as meaningful in its own right rules out importing the cherubim and their concomitant ideas.

Still, what Ezekiel 1 does present about the creatures is meaningful for understanding Yhwh's kingship. On account of the numerous efforts to explain the faces of the creatures, a tentative consensus seems to have settled across the field.⁵⁹ 1) Each face represents the creatures hailed as most noble in the ancient world.⁶⁰ As a setting for a fine jewel enhances the jewel, so the lordly creatures speak to and even burnish Yhwh's kingship. 2) The number

⁵⁸ J.W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (NCB; London: Nelson, 1969), 40.

⁵⁹ In part thanks to O. Keel's extensive iconographic analysis, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst: Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 3* (SBS 84/85; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 125-273.

⁶⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.56, paralleling his article, 'Ezekiel's Vision: Literary and Iconographic Aspects', in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures* (ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 159-168.

four represents a universality or completion due to its correspondence with the four points of the compass.⁶¹ And, as is well-known, the wider Mesopotamian *Umwelt* prized the number for this reason and often incorporated it into titles of deities and kings, e.g., ‘shepherdship over the four regions’.⁶² The four superior creatures bearing the throne speak to the transcendence of the one seated on the throne, for, as they are great, the one who sits upon the throne is greater still.⁶³

4.4 Radiance

For now, a final component of Ezekiel 1 seals the emphasis on Yhwh’s overwhelming grandeur.⁶⁴ The most stupefying verse in Ezekiel 1 may be the baffling note about the wheels in v. 18. A traditional translation reads, ‘Their

⁶¹ M.H. Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923), 114–116. Here going beyond Block (*Ezekiel*, 1.97) who notes but does not explain a link to the compass points.

⁶² ‘Assurbanipal’s Coronation Hymn’ translated A. Livingstone; (COS 1.142:473–474). For analysis of this theme, H. Tadmor, ‘World Dominion: The Expanding Horizon of the Assyrian Empire’, in *Landscapes: Territories, Frontiers, and Horizons in the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented to the 44th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, 1997* (ed. L. Milano et al.; Padova: Sargon, 1999), 1:55–62.

⁶³ L.-S. Tiemeyer hears the noise ‘like an army’ (the creature’s wings in v. 24) as an allusion to the heavenly council, which, as she notes, functioned militarily and thus befits Ezekiel’s deity-king, ‘Zechariah’s Spies and Ezekiel’s Cherubim,’ in *Tradition in Transition: Haggai and Zechariah 1–8 in the Trajectory of Hebrew Theology* (ed. M.J. Boda and M. Floyd; LHBOTS 475; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 115. But mention of an army should not evoke military or royal notions any more than ‘the sound of many waters’ should raise suspicion that Ezekiel has co-opted sea imagery for Yhwh.

⁶⁴ The crystalline throne platform borne by the living creatures also plausibly contributes to Yhwh’s transcendence, but the case requires development beyond what space constraints allow. Also, בן-אדם, glossed variously as ‘son of man’, ‘human’, or ‘mortal’, seems geared toward highlighting Yhwh’s exalted status in relation to the prophet, but its ubiquity in the book detracts from its present value.

rims were tall and awesome, for the rims of all four were full of eyes all around' (NRSV). The first half has proved a perennial puzzle on account of its unexpected forms. Cooke, for example, appeals to LXX εἶδόν ('I saw') as indication that the original was corrupted from וָאֵרָא וְהָנָה גִּבַּת לָהֶם ('I looked and behold they were tall').⁶⁵ Eichrodt even claimed that this clause is 'untranslatable'.⁶⁶ Undaunted, Nahum Waldman argued in contrast that comparison with Mesopotamian linguistic data could recast the problem in a light suitable to the context of Ezekiel 1 and conducive to the MT syntax. His solution hinged on corresponding the Akkadian terms *puluḫtu* ('fear') and *melammu* ('radiance') to the Hebrew of this verse יָרָא ('fear') and גִּבָּה ('loftiness', 'pride'). Waldman then offered a revised translation honed here to read, 'Their rims were majestic and terrifying'.⁶⁷

Shawn Aster's exhaustive study of these Akkadian terms found further that *puluḫtu* occurs as shorthand for the syntagm *puluḫti melammi*, that is, the fear that occurs after seeing radiance.⁶⁸ The seminal work of Leo Oppenheim inaugurated scholarly interest in the term *melammu*, leading to fruitful debate.⁶⁹ Now a consensus sees it referring primarily to divine and

⁶⁵ G.B. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 26.

⁶⁶ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 50.

⁶⁷ N. M. Waldman, 'A Note on Ezekiel 1:18', *JBL* 103 (1984): 614-618.

⁶⁸ S. Z. Aster, 'The Phenomenon of Divine and Human Radiance in the Hebrew Bible and in Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Literature: A Philological and Comparative Study' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 109-23.

⁶⁹ A.L. Oppenheim, 'Akkadian *pul(u)ḫ(t)u* and *melammu*', *JAOS* 63 (1943): 31-34.

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royal brilliance that creates fear in the deity or king's opponents and thus validates the bearer's authority.⁷⁰ Aster's work, then, allows that Waldman's suggestion on Ezek 1:18 can be developed by positing a double confirmation of the wheels' awe-inspiring qualities.⁷¹ As both Waldman and Aster note, seeing the wheels as denoting the Akkadian concept of *melammu* not only resolves the grammatical problems that vexed Cooke and Eichrodt, but, more importantly, deepens the coherence of Ezekiel 1 by linking the wheels to the pervasive statements of visual brilliance.⁷²

That said, neither scholar completes the puzzle. As a common attribute of deities in Mesopotamian literature, radiance (*melammu*) creates a sensible link between the visual brightness of Ezekiel 1 and Yhwh, Israel's deity.⁷³ But Ezekiel 1 is about Yhwh's kingship. To see things from Ezekiel's eyes (which earlier arguments established as key to understanding the vision), maintaining the order of vv. 26-28 is essential. The appearance of the throne and its denizen (vv. 26-27) precedes the figure's identification as Yhwh (v. 28), suggesting further that Ezekiel 1 would predicate deity onto the king rather than kingship onto the deity. Thus, if Ezekiel 1 evokes comparison with

⁷⁰ For other bearers of *melammu*, Aster, 'Phenomenon', 80-88.

⁷¹ Cf. S.Z. Aster, 'The Image of Assyria in Isaiah 2:5-22: The Campaign Motif Reversed', *JAOS* 127 (2007): 274, n.101.

⁷² To note some, 'brightness' (נֹהַר), vv. 4, 13, 27, 28; 'electrum' (חֶשְׁמֶל), vv. 4, 27; 'sparkling like polished bronze' (נֹצְצִים כַּעֲשֵׂן נְחֹשֶׁת קָלִיל), v. 7; 'burning coals' (נְחֹלֵי-אֵשׁ בַּעֲרוֹת), v. 13.

⁷³ By inference, this is Block's position, *Ezekiel*, 1.99-101. He accepts Waldman's interpretation (99, n.68) but mentions nothing of Yhwh's kingship.

thematic resonances related to Mesopotamian radiance, the proper subcategory is royal radiance not divine.

As Aster explains, Neo-Assyrian uses of *melammu* evidence a semantic shift (from earlier uses) orienting the term primarily towards kingly power in order to ‘reflect royal legitimacy’.⁷⁴ So, gloating in his military success, Sennacherib says of Hezekiah, ‘fear of my *melammu* overcame him’.⁷⁵ And Nebuchadnezzar II validates his kingship by speaking of a palace ‘wrapped in dignity, majesty and *melammu* of the glory of kingship’.⁷⁶ Given the centrality of Yhwh’s kingship, a similar notion appears in Ezekiel 1. This is not to posit a literary relationship between Ezekiel 1 and Mesopotamian literature but to acknowledge the possibility of thematic overlap as recommended by the ‘comparative method’.⁷⁷

Aster, however, concludes that the author of Ezekiel 1 ‘seems to base his visual depictions of *kebod* YHWH [sic.] on Mesopotamian parallels’ though with ‘significant differences’, for example, in allowing Yhwh’s glory to depart from a city.⁷⁸ Aster also suggests that Ezekiel diverges from Hebrew Bible traditions by ascribing radiance to the glory of Yhwh. Yet, in spite of Aster’s

⁷⁴ Aster, ‘Phenomenon’, 102. See also 150.

⁷⁵ Cited in Aster, ‘Phenomenon’, 131.

⁷⁶ S.H. Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Königinschriften* (VAB 4; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), 118, ii, 54-55.

⁷⁷ As W.W. Hallo has exemplified in e.g., ‘Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Approach’, in C.D. Evans, W.W. Hallo, and J.B. White (eds.), *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1980), 1-26. Cf. Chapter 1, §4.

⁷⁸ Aster, ‘Phenomenon’, 426. The discussion of Ezekiel spans pages 407-427.

fine scholarship, it is not clear that Ezekiel's 'glory of Yhwh' diverges as much from either Mesopotamian or Hebrew Bible counterparts as Aster claims. If, as hinted above (§3.3), Yhwh's glory refers to the entire representation of Yhwh's presence, then its awesome luminescence is not an inherent quality of the glory itself. Rather, it appears because of the special point that Ezekiel puts on Yhwh's identity.⁷⁹ To Ezekiel, Yhwh is a king venturing to subdue his peoples; that is why the *melammu*-like qualities appear in Ezekiel 1. Thus, Ezekiel accords with Hebrew Bible traditions that mention little of the radiance appearing here and with Mesopotamian *melammu* depictions that ascribe awe-inspiring brilliance to dominant kings.

Yhwh's radiance in Ezekiel 1 indicates both the reality and character of his royalty, strengthening his claim to kingship. In three other texts (3:23, 8:4, 43:3), Ezekiel refers to the glory of Yhwh with reference to the first vision but with far less detail. By explicitly linking to the sights of Ezekiel 1, these later visions assume a uniformity to what the prophet saw, providing literary unity to the book, as many have noted.⁸⁰ Most, however, have overlooked that this unity centres on Yhwh's exalted kingship.

5. Military prowess

Ezekiel 1 undeniably presents Yhwh as an exalted king; his transcendence is clear, thanks to the four points surveyed in the preceding section (§4). The

⁷⁹ Closer to the mark, Aster states of the Sinai theophany (Exo 24:15-18) that '*Kebod YHWH* [sic.] is used in reference to the person or self of YHWH being present...in a particular location', 'Phenomenon', 359.

⁸⁰ Especially, H. Van Dyke Parunak, 'The Literary Architecture of Ezekiel's MAR'OT 'ELOHIM', *JBL* 99 (1980): 61-74.

second theme of Ezekiel 1 relevant to Yhwh's kingship adds a further dimension: his military prowess, a notion anticipated by the possibility that the pervasive brightness of the vision overlaps with the connotations of Akkadian *melammu*. Yhwh's exaltation is a vehicle for the central aim of his appearing, namely, to initiate war on his rebellious subjects.

To be sure, Ezekiel 1 lacks overt expression of Yhwh's bellicose intentions, but the Chronicler still found indication of 'the golden chariot of the cherubim' (1 Chron 28:18). And the inventive exegesis that developed the so-called *merkabah* theology of the rabbinic tradition also viewed the wheels of vv. 16, 19-21 as chariot wheels.⁸¹ The text is painfully vague, referring only to wheels and never explicitly to a chariot, but the interpretive consensus accepts that wheels are in themselves quite useless and that a chariot best suits the (assumed) ancient setting of the vision.⁸² The image of a mobile chariot further supports the notion of Yhwh's freedom to trespass the territory of Nebuchadnezzar and Marduk. The chariot also indicates that Yhwh is no passive king but that he initiates engagement with his people. Consonant with the major theme of Ezekiel 1-24, however, Yhwh engages his people in war, not peace. After all, the chariot was primarily a war vehicle that enabled manoeuvrability and tactical readiness.⁸³ Thus, Ezekiel sees

⁸¹ Also, the plus of LXX 43:3 has, 'and the vision of the chariot which I saw was like the vision which I saw by the river Chobar', on which D.J. Halperin, 'Merkabah Midrash in the Septuagint', *JBL* 101 (1982): 351-363. Cf. Ben Sira 49:8.

⁸² Representative of a consensus, Block (*Ezekiel*, 1.100) presumes a chariot but offers no defence.

⁸³ L.L. Orlin, *Life and Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2007), 82.

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Yhwh as a warrior who has journeyed to Babylon to reveal himself in power to exiled Judahites.⁸⁴

As discussed more fully below (§6.1), Yhwh commissions Ezekiel to announce the divine king's judgement against the 'the nation of rebels who rebelled against' (2:3) him. Spoken from a king enthroned in a chariot, the language of rebellion is loaded with political overtones. Ezekiel's message from Yhwh promises that the divine king will subdue his people, and the sign-acts of Ezek 4-5 confirm this. The chariot anticipates the judgments of siege warfare, deportation, and destruction by the sword by identifying Yhwh as a military commander, a king. Military imagery, of course, is a subset of royal imagery.⁸⁵ For example, Saul was a 'mighty man' (2 Sam 1:21), and David famously opted out of war when other kings went (2 Sam 11:1). So, on the model of an ancient king, the vision presents Yhwh as he prepares to direct the battle against his insubordinate subjects.

And yet for the (assumed) sixth century BCE context, the four-wheeled chariot of Ezek 1 is horribly outmoded as a vehicle of war.⁸⁶ To be sure, at one time four-wheeled chariots were common in ancient Mesopotamia, but, around 1600 BCE, technological advancements and the domestication of horses

⁸⁴ Pace Joyce, among others, who considers Yhwh's appearing 'beneficent if awesome', *Ezekiel*, 68.

⁸⁵ For more examples and discussion see Brettler, *King*, 57-58.

⁸⁶ A prize illustration of the four-wheeled chariot appears on the reverse of the 'Standard of Ur', ca. 2500 BCE. For the image and discussion, e.g., D.P. Hansen 'Art of the Royal Tombs of Ur: A Brief Interpretation', in *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur* (ed. R.L. Zettler and L. Horne; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1998), 43-47.

proliferated the two-wheeled chariot.⁸⁷ At the time of Neo-Babylonian dominance, a king mustering troops for battle would almost certainly marshal a two-wheeled chariot. Nevertheless, one of the scenes from the ninth century gates of Shalmaneser III at Balawat includes a four-wheeled chariot from which archers fire upon a besieged city.⁸⁸ So, although two-wheeled chariots had long since outpaced their larger counterparts, the Assyrians, it seems, still employed the four-wheeled chariot. Even some two-hundred years later, the four-wheeled versions still appeared on the battlefield, though now as ‘unwieldy prestige vehicles’ in shows of power, rather than as combat vehicles.⁸⁹

Perhaps the chariot of Ezekiel I is built on the model of these four-wheeled, show chariots.⁹⁰ Like the confident soldiers of seventh-century Assyria, Yhwh assumes the chariot in order to parade his might. The chariot is a symbol of his overwhelming strength and indicates the finality of his

⁸⁷ A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000-330 BC, Vol. 1* (London: Routledge, 1995), 104. Kuhrt cites correspondence from Mari as evidence that two-wheeled chariots may have originated in Mesopotamia. Cf. the classic treatment of M.A. Littauer and J.H. Crouwel, *Wheeled Vehicles and Ridden Animals in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 69. Recent discoveries of Scythian chariots from as early as 2000 BCE may eventually alter this consensus, R.E. Gaebel, *Cavalry Operations in the Ancient Greek World* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 2002), 35.

⁸⁸ L.W. King, ed., *Bronze Reliefs from the Gates of Shalmaneser, King of Assyria 860-825 BC* (London: British Museum, 1915), plate 50.

⁸⁹ G.G. Fagan, ‘I Fell upon Him like a Furious Arrow: Toward a Reconstruction of the Assyrian Tactical System’, in *New Perspectives on Ancient Warfare* (ed., G.G. Fagan and M. Trundle; HW 59; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 85.

⁹⁰ Drawing this parallel in no way posits the Balawat Gates as Ezekiel’s ‘real-world’ source. The longevity of the four-wheeled chariot’s career is enough to suggest the ubiquity of the image.

enemy's fate. Although the battle has yet to occur, the mighty combatant knows the outcome and enjoys the leisure of attacking as he pleases, even announcing his strategies to his enemies. Yhwh, depicted as a royal warrior, appears to Ezekiel in a four-wheeled chariot as a show of force, demonstrating that none is like Yhwh.

6.0 Planning battle

Ezekiel 1 introduces the king, Yhwh, showing him to be transcendent and geared for war. In Ezekiel 2-5, the king speaks and confirms the prophet's initial experience by preparing the prophet for communicating the king's wishes to his delinquent subjects. This section examines two features of Ezekiel 2-5 that begin to construct the royal persona and continue to lay a programmatic foundation for the remainder of the book.⁹¹

6.1 Rebellion

Chapter 1 asserted that politics, broadly conceived, involves the public exercise and legitimation of power (§1). Significantly, then Yhwh speaks as one engaged in a political activity, for, in unveiling the prophet's task to confront 'nations of rebels who have rebelled' (2:3), Yhwh shows himself as exercising and legitimating power.⁹² Whatever the relationship between the Hebrew גוֹי and the modern notion of 'nation', both refer to a public, corporate entity.⁹³ The designation 'rebels' implies both that Yhwh is

⁹¹ Other topics, such as the theme of Yhwh's sword, are deferred to Chapter 8.

⁹² Following LXX, Pohlmann omits 'to nations', *Hesekiel/Ezechiel*, 1.45. But, Syriac reads singular 'nation', and the plural Hebrew (גוֹיִם) could occur as reference to the severed unity of Yhwh's people, a sign of their rebellion against Yhwh, as Block notes, *Ezekiel*, 1.115, n.15.

⁹³ On the dynamics of statehood in the Hebrew Bible, Gottwald, *Politics of Ancient Israel*, 32-106.

concerned with displaying his power to the nations and that he views their activity as an attempt to contravene his power. Rebellion, then, is inherently political.⁹⁴ Following the depiction of a king bathed in terrifying grandeur, the political dimension of rebellion is heightened. There is thus no need, *pace* Allen, to see rebellion as a ‘theological metaphor derived from a political act’.⁹⁵

The people’s rejection of Yhwh’s authority permeates Ezekiel 2-3 through eight instances of the noun ‘rebellion’ (מַרְדִּי).⁹⁶ Used adjectivally, as here, the word connotes the state of being in resistance to authority and rejection of an established power. Unlike with the verb ‘to rebel’ (מָרַד), people branded ‘rebellious’ (מַרְדִּי) primarily offend Yhwh, not human political entities, (e.g., Num 17:25, ET 17:10). But, this dynamic likely owes to the subtle difference between מָרַד (acting rebelliously) and מִרְדָּה (acting out of rebellion).⁹⁷ The first refers to the act of revolt against overlords, accounting for its use describing human political behaviour. The second describes an action borne out of a disposition or state of being given to eschewing authority.

This distinction may illuminate why Yhwh uses the first sense in his initial description of his people (2:3) but resorts to the second sense in

⁹⁴ Elsewhere the verb ‘to rebel’ (מָרַד) overwhelmingly describes rejection of political authority by disgruntled subjects, e.g., various kings against Chedorlaomer (Gen 14:4); Hezekiah against Assyria (2 Kgs 18:7); Jehoiakim and Zedekiah against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs 24:1, 20; cf. Jer 52:3, Ezek 17:5).

⁹⁵ Allen, *Ezekiel*, 1.39.

⁹⁶ 2:5-8; 3:9, 26-27. The root verb מִרְדָּה occurs in 5:6.

⁹⁷ Cf. DCH, 4:478, 480-81.

successive descriptions. Israel and Judah have acted rebelliously, attempting to throw off his kingship. Their action derives from a deep-seated proclivity toward rejecting Yhwh.⁹⁸ In tarring his people as ‘nations of rebels who have rebelled’, Yhwh leaves no doubt that they have engaged in a political act against him. After all, he is a king and apparently not in name only.

6.2 The watchman

The political character of Yhwh’s kingship deepens further in the second encounter between the prophet and the deity (3:16-5:17). Yhwh states, ‘Son of man, I have set you as a watchman for the house of Israel’ (3:17). In accord with the traditional interest in Ezekiel 1-5, William Brownlee represents many scholars in summarizing the watchman motif (3:16-21) as ‘very important for understanding [Ezekiel’s] sense of mission [and] explaining his intense concern in his touring of Palestine and other places’.⁹⁹ Whatever the chronology of composition between this passage and its longer counterpart (33:1-20), the role of a watchman seems to circumscribe the prophet’s duties.

A watchman, of course, was a lookout; only by extension does the term apply to prophets.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere a watchman examines the horizon for traffic approaching a military garrison (1 Sam 14:16) or the king’s city (2 Sam 18:24-27; 2 Kgs 9:17-18, 20). His duty lies in providing information in advance of

⁹⁸ Cf. Chapter 8, §2.1 and the similar drama of rebellion in Ezek 17:12, 15.

⁹⁹ W.H. Brownlee, ‘Ezekiel’s Parable of the Watchman and the Editing of Ezekiel’, VT 28 (1978): 392.

¹⁰⁰ As also Hos 9:8 where the prophet is ‘a watchman for Ephraim’ and Jer 6:17 where Yhwh refers to ‘watchmen’ for Judah. But not the more personal expressions in Hab 2:1 and Mic 7:7 that, albeit with a different term, compare well to Psa 130:6.

the traffic's arrival, allowing the inhabitants of his location to prepare. But this much is clear even from the book of Ezekiel, leading Ronald Hals to state that here the prophet obtains a 'pastoral responsibility' derived from the 'divine will to save life'.¹⁰¹

As yet unnoticed, however, is the suitability of the watchman motif to the kingship of Yhwh.¹⁰² Indeed, as argued above, the call of the prophet Ezekiel centres less on the human figure than the deity who conscripts him. And, since that deity is a resplendent, warrior king, parading confidently in his chariot, the watchman's duties are particularly apropos to the prophet Ezekiel. By Yhwh's orders, Ezekiel will warn his compatriots that the king approaches with the bellicose intentions that find fuller expression in the signs of siege in Ezekiel 4-5. Yet, even in itself, the watchman motif contributes to the central theme of Ezekiel 1-5: Yhwh's kingship.¹⁰³

Although not a political office, the watchman participates in the broad project of the public exercise of power because he acts on behalf of a corporate entity in which a political authority resides. His efforts to warn the city convey complicity in validating its power structures; the watchman's success is a key component in the longevity of the political figures within the

¹⁰¹ R.M. Hals, *Ezekiel* (FOTL 19; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 24.

¹⁰² Even Greenberg, sensitive to literary coherence, takes no notice, *Ezekiel*, 1.87-97 and his article 'The Meaning and Location of the "Lookout" Passage in Ezek. 3:16-21', *PAAJR* 46 (1979-80): 265-280.

¹⁰³ Although valuably linking Ezekiel's role as watchman to the prophetic office, H.G. Reventlow neglects the political overtones, *Wächter über Israel: Ezechiel und seine Tradition* (BZAW 82; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1962), 126-134. Further study of Ezekiel's role would do well to reconsider the prophetic task in light of the commissioning agent, Yhwh the king.

city. Of course, a political element seems absent from the prophet's watchman duties; Yhwh specifies that Ezekiel's task is morally-focused, engaged with the wicked and righteous individuals within the corporate whole. As a watchman, the prophet's concern lies in preserving the lives of Judahites whom Yhwh deems righteous; he is not interested in preserving the political leaders or even the corporate whole.

Nevertheless, in keeping with the watchman motif, Yhwh later identifies the target of Ezekiel's warning as Jerusalem (4:1).¹⁰⁴ The prophet's role is to warn the city of the impending siege that the deity-king will bring upon it, much as a non-prophetic watchman might. Following the exalted description of the king in Ezekiel 1, it is little surprise to read in Ezekiel 4-5 that the attack on the city will result in horrific destruction. The king is poised to display his might. The four-part depiction of the siege (Ezekiel 4) and the tripartite description of assault (Ezekiel 5) suggest that nothing can deter him.

The watchman motif is a minor but notable royal ripple that extends into the predictive account of Jerusalem's demise. When read in light of Yhwh's kingship, Ezekiel 3:16-5:17 strengthen the impression that appeared in the first vision: Yhwh approaches with flexed military might. Ezekiel's role as watchman thus acquires greater rationale; with a marauding king on the horizon, Jerusalem needs a lookout. Were the king coming in peace, the watchman motif would be empty of rhetorical power. As it is, this second encounter between Yhwh and the prophet exists in a reciprocal relationship

¹⁰⁴ Here the originality of the unusual אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם ('Jerusalem') is immaterial, since Isa 7:17, 20 also use the construction אֶת + substantive for an appositional statement. Cf. Allen, *Ezekiel*, 1.50.

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with Ezekiel 1. A watchman is necessary since a king is coming to lay siege. In turn, however, the import of the watchman on account of the siege informs the reader of the sort of king that Ezekiel initially saw.

Conclusion

While the opening vision includes the call of Yhwh's prophet, attention to the narrative texture of Ezekiel 1 shows that the centrepiece of the pericope is not the prophet's own experience but the object of his vision, the radiant figure upon a dazzling throne. Various components of the vision indicate the incomparability of his kingship and situate Ezekiel 1-5 as a prolegomena to the remainder of the book. For example, in disregarding national boundaries, Yhwh appears as a cosmic king whose subjects include not only national Israel but also her captors and neighbours (cf. Chapter 8, §5). The dynamic between Yhwh's incomparability and his intent to subdue rebellious Israel also introduces a persistent theme: the tension between the certainty of Yhwh's kingship and the admission of its future fullness.

As an initial glimpse at Yhwh's kingship, Ezekiel 1-5 begins to answer the question of how Yhwh's royalty participates in the political realm. Although understated, he appears to rival Nebuchadnezzar by trespassing on Babylonian territory in order to claim authority over his people whom Babylon holds captive. Further, in repeatedly accusing his people of rebellion, Yhwh indicates his interest in public affairs, a point underscored by the relative absence of cultic violations. Ezekiel 1-5 portray Yhwh as intimately involved in the public exercise and validation of power, particularly in relation to national Israel. And, in light of the linguistic foundations established in Chapter 2, this characterization of Yhwh begins to build the

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case that the kingship of Ezekiel's Yhwh is not merely a theological motif but is a forceful entity demanding consideration within the political sphere.

Chapter 4 now develops and nuances this vision of Yhwh's kingship.

Chapter 4—The King at War (Ezekiel 8-11)

1. Introduction

Following Ezekiel 1, the next overt statement of Yhwh's kingship occurs in Ezek 10:1. Here, in a vision redolent of his first vision, the prophet sees a throne upon a platform. And, as in Ezekiel 1, the explicitly royal 'throne' colours the surrounding text. A full appreciation of the royal imagery thus requires examination of the larger context.

1.1 Coherence

At first blush, such a contextual approach comports with the apparent homogeneity of Ezekiel 8-11. Early readers of Ezekiel, the scribes of Codex Vaticanus, seem to have recognized this unity, since they copied the vision of Ezekiel 8-11 as a single textual unit.¹ And in the early twentieth century, even the radical C.C. Torrey admitted the homogeneity of these chapters.² More recently, Eichrodt represents the majority in recognizing Ezekiel 8-11 as 'a carefully calculated composition dealing with one self-contained event'.³

Formulaic clauses distinguish Ezekiel 8-11 as a distinct section. In 8:1 the date formula 'In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day' initiates a break from the 'word of Yhwh' (7:1) that the prophet received in 7:2-27.

Following the vision's close, Ezek 12:1 opens a new section with the common

¹J. W. Olley, *Ezekiel: A Commentary Based on Iezekiël in Codex Vaticanus* (SeptCS; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 283.

²C.C. Torrey, 'Notes on Ezekiel', *JBL* 58 (1939): 77.

³Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 112.

phrase ‘the word of Yhwh came to me’. In itself the formula of 12:1 may be insufficient to designate 12:1 as opening a new section.

So, it is also helpful to note that the narrative texture of Ezekiel 8-11 supports viewing it as a single textual unit. The *inclusio* formed by reference to the spirit of Yhwh (8:3, 11:24) casts these chapters as a single visionary experience. More subtly, the events of this experience are woven together to portray the prophet as journeying around the (visional) temple of Jerusalem as if on a single occasion. The tour progresses in three stages. 1) In 8:3-16, Yhwh demonstrates to Ezekiel the faithlessness of the people by showcasing four scenes of sin in the temple.⁴ 2) In 8:17-10:22, Ezekiel witnesses Yhwh’s judgment upon this sin. 3) Ezekiel 11 depicts yet another scene of sin, against which Yhwh promises both further judgment and unexpected mercy. On its face, the entire vision revolves around the narrative of the prophet’s encounter with Yhwh.

1.2 Textual fissures

In spite of these unifying characteristics, many careful readers of Ezekiel 8-11 have countered that the apparent unity is a mirage. For example, in spite of touting its unity, Eichrodt charges that ‘we cannot accept as satisfactory the extant text in the form in which it has come to us’.⁵ Equally, Torrey epitomizes a troupe of scholars who view the entire book of Ezekiel, including these chapters, as a mosaic compiled from disparate shards.⁶ From this

⁴ The figure Ezekiel meets is unnamed, but contextual features compel identification as Yhwh. Cf. Parunak, ‘Literary Architecture’, 67 and §2 below.

⁵ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 112.

⁶ Torrey, ‘Notes’, 78.

perspective, attempts to read the vision of Ezekiel 8-11 as a unified whole smack of naiveté and neglect the ‘tensions and fractures’ that an editor has mended and eased.⁷ Two contested passages illustrate that textual fissures threaten to swallow the present enterprise of reading these chapters as an extended statement of Yhwh’s kingship.⁸

1) Ezekiel 10 is problematic because, in Mendiart Dijkstra’s clever phrase, the text ‘appears larded’ to the point of unintelligibility.⁹ So significant are the textual accretions that even Greenberg, the paragon of a holistic approach, admits a degree of ‘disarray’.¹⁰ Many have thus supposed that much of Ezekiel 10 arrived in its present location as an addendum to an earlier textual core and thus does not legitimately belong in dialogue with adjacent chapters.¹¹ For example, the glory of Yhwh seems to dance like a dervish, first with Ezekiel (8:1, 4) then rising from the cherub (9:3/10:4) and finally to the cherubim throne and beyond (10:18). Yet the elevation of the glory from the cherub occurs without any notice that the glory had left its position with Ezekiel. Explaining this apparent oversight as a feature of the

⁷ F.L. Hossfeld, ‘Die Tempelvision Ez 8-11 im Licht unterschiedlicher methodischer Zugänge’, in *EHB*, 165.

⁸ Minor glosses do not compromise the text’s capacity to function as a literary unit, e.g., those recognized by G. Fohrer, ‘Die Glossen im Buche Ezechiel’, *ZAW* 63 (1951): 39-44 or K. Freed, ‘The Glosses in Ezekiel I-XXIV’, *VT* 20 (1970): 149-152.

⁹ M. Dijkstra, ‘The Glosses in Ezekiel Reconsidered: Aspects of Textual Transmission in Ezekiel 10’, in *EHB*, 63.

¹⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.196.

¹¹ E.g., A. Bertholet with K. Galling, *Hesekiel* (HAT 13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1936), 29.

vision stretches plausibility, since elsewhere the visional narrative proceeds intelligibly, albeit at some remove from (earthly) reality. Another challenge to a unified reading of Ezekiel 8-11 is the enigma of 10:9-17. David Halperin speaks for many in concluding that this section ‘offers little to its immediate context’.¹² Also, as noted below, the throne of 10:1 strikes many scholars as extraneous to the visional narrative. For studying the royal resonances of 10:1, this particular concern is singularly troubling.

2) As Zimmerli states bluntly, the whole of Ezekiel 11 ‘is marked out as a foreign element in the surrounding section’.¹³ After the wholesale destruction witnessed in Ezekiel 9-10, the vision surprisingly returns to life, as Ezekiel sees twenty-five (living) men, including two whom he names. The previous two chapters left little doubt about the fate of Jerusalem, but Ezekiel 11 allows that some survived Yhwh’s retributive violence. The death of Peletiah (v. 13) seems to conflict with Ezekiel 9-10 because here Yhwh’s retribution comes via Yhwh’s word (through Ezekiel), rather than via the executioners of Ezek 9:2-8. The word of hope in vv. 14-21 clashes with the sombre tone of judgment that pervades Ezek 8:1-11:13, and the focus in vv. 14-21 also strains against its immediate context. Whereas vv. 1-13 castigate sins of violence, here Yhwh promises his presence with the exilic community. The thematic disjunction is difficult to resolve.¹⁴

¹² D. Halperin, ‘The Exegetical Character of Ezekiel X 9-17’, VT 26 (1976): 131.

¹³ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 1.231.

¹⁴ Joyce, *Divine Initiative*, 114-115.

1.3 Resolution

For over a century, many scholars have sought resolution to the problems in Ezekiel 8-11 by pursuing an original core.¹⁵ For example, Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann has suggested a four-stage textual development in order to account for the obvious unevenness.¹⁶ Pohlmann's theory, as many others', has merit and deserves attention. But the present task of exploring Yhwh's kingship does not require adopting one theory of editorial history over another. For now, no solution to the debate is even necessary since, as noted above (Chapter 1, §5), the base of study is the received Hebrew text. Isolating the purportedly original words of Ezekiel 8-11, disregards the intentional fusing of textual fragments and thus, by definition, overlooks the aesthetics of the final form.¹⁷

More importantly, though, the broad contours of the debate suggest its intractability and thus also the futility of launching a slim investigation into literary strata.¹⁸ The matter of composition history deserves a thorough, studied answer, the sort of response that does not fit the present project. After all, as Henry McKeating has observed, controversies about Ezekiel's composition emerge 'to a considerable extent not directly from the book

¹⁵ Dijkstra surveys attempts to explain the seams in the text, recognizing the inevitable variance achieved by non-scientific approaches, 'The Glosses in Ezekiel', 55-60.

¹⁶ K.-F. Pohlmann, *Ezechielstudien: Zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Buches und zur Frage nach den ältesten Texten* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992), 96-107.

¹⁷ Cf. D.M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: WJK, 1996), 23-40.

¹⁸ A. Wood draws a similar conclusion, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim* (BZAW 385; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 105.

itself but from the presuppositions' with which interpreters approach it.¹⁹

Among the more dominant has been the presupposition that reputable study of Ezekiel (and for that matter the entire HB) requires a journey *ad fontes*.

But, as early as 1937 George Dahl recognized that this assumption was largely alien to Ezekiel itself; thus Dahl referred to 'a modern occidental author's horror of repetition' as driving the scholarly agenda.²⁰ If, seventy years ago, Dahl could admit the imposition of an alien force upon the text, surely there is now intellectual room to resist this force and read with the grain of the text.²¹

A disadvantage of pursuing the original text of Ezekiel is that the texture of the text itself is overlooked. In contrast, eschewing the quest for the very words of the prophet permits greater attention to the text itself. Refocusing the investigative lens on the unit as a whole may even help to mend the textual fissures of Ezekiel 8-11. For example, McKeating allows that purported oddities, like the scenes of Ezekiel 11, owe to the 'surrealism' of

¹⁹ H. McKeating, *Ezekiel* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 41.

²⁰ G. Dahl, 'Crisis in Ezekiel Research', in *Quantulacumque: Studies Presented to Kirsopp Lake* (ed. R.P. Casey et al.; London: Christophers, 1937), 270. Cf. U. Cassuto's observation that the cultural gulf between early readers of Ezekiel and today's may mean that 'what seems "chaotic" in a modern European work may be considered an excellent arrangement in a Hebrew book of antiquity', *The Arrangement of the Book of Ezekiel*, in *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (2 vols; trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1973-75), 1.227.

²¹ A recent proponent of this approach is, Mayfield, *Literary Structure*, 3-4.

vision.²² And Greenberg quotes a rabbinic source in concluding that ‘Scripture disregards chronological order’.²³

Reading Ezekiel 8-11 as a single unit is thus reasonable.²⁴ And, in the following pages, the value of this unified reading comes to the fore in yet another effort to understand how the book of Ezekiel depicts Yhwh as king. Without a doubt, the text appears in places to be composite, but this should not preclude the fruitfulness of reading the chapters in concert. Taking a synchronic approach does not represent a slight of a diachronic approach; both have merit, depending on the interests of the reader.²⁵ Building on the linguistic foundations developed in Chapter 2, the present interest is how Ezekiel 8-11 construct a picture of Yhwh’s kingship. Or put differently, this chapter explores where ‘Yhwh is King’ falls on the spectrum of utterance transparency. The key test for this is how the text portrays Yhwh as functioning like a king.

2. The throne reprised

Inhabiting a throne is nothing if not an action of a monarch. Thus, a foray into the depiction of Yhwh’s kingship in Ezekiel 8-11 logically begins with the overt expression of 10:1 that cues the reader to the royal theme, ‘And, behold,

²²McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 18. Cf. Wevers, ‘an ecstatic vision is not to be construed as a logical consecution of events’, *Ezekiel*, 87.

²³M. Greenberg, ‘The Vision of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 8-11: A Holistic Interpretation’, in *The Divine Helmsman: Studies in God’s Control of Human Events Presented to Louis H. Silberman* (ed. J.L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel; New York: KTAV, 1980), 145.

²⁴Even the idiosyncratic approach of J. Becker operates from this platform, ‘Ez 8-11 als einheitliche Komposition in einem pseudepigraphischen Ezechielbuch’, in *EHB*, 136-150.

²⁵Cf. S.S. Tuell, ‘Contemporary Studies of Ezekiel: A New Tide Rising’, in *EHW*, 241.

I saw upon the platform like lapis lazuli that was above the heads of the cherubim the appearance of a form of a throne visible above them'.²⁶ Though not verbatim, 10:1 corresponds so closely to its predecessor in 1:26 that, aside from syntax and obvious synonyms, the description of the royal seat in 10:1 diverges from 1:26 only in its mention of the 'cherubim'. The thrust of both verses is that the prophet saw a brilliant blue throne installed over mysterious creatures.

However, unlike its counterpart in 1:26, the throne of 10:1 lacks explicit links to the surrounding vision. Whereas the throne of Ezekiel 1 occurs as a focal point of the prophet's visionary experience, in Ezekiel 10, the prophet mentions the throne only after he has witnessed the abominations of the temple in Ezekiel 8 and the massacre of the city in Ezekiel 9. At first blush, then, the throne hardly seems an important component of the vision. John Strong thus labels 10:1 'secondary' and inveighs against seeing the throne as programmatic for the vision.²⁷

But Ezekiel does not downgrade the importance of the throne by noting it only in 10:1. Further, reading with the grain of the text, there is no reason to assume that the throne only arrives in Ezekiel's vision after the massacre of Ezekiel 9 or, alternatively, that 10:1 exists thanks to a zealous redactor intent on harmonizing the vision with Ezekiel 1. Rather, the throne

²⁶ As noted in Chapter 3, §4.3, the relationship between Ezekiel 1 and 10 is important for considering textual development, but such considerations are extraneous at present.

²⁷ Strong, 'God's *Kābôd*', 86. Cf. C.B. Houk, 'The Final Redaction of Ezekiel 10', *JBL* 90 (1971): 48-49.

has been present throughout the vision.²⁸ Already the prophet has identified a repeated appearance of ‘the glory of Yhwh’ (8:4). As seen in Chapter 3, ‘the glory of Yhwh’ refers to the entire complex of sights that the prophet saw in the vision of Ezekiel 1, at whose centre was the dazzling figure upon the throne. Although Ezek 8:2-4 neglect mention of the throne, recognizing the glory of Yhwh is proof enough that the throne of 10:1 is not out of place. What is more, noting this coherence provides fresh insight for the literary value of the throne in 10:1, as explored throughout this chapter.

As the vision opens (8:1-4), the prophet’s eyes seize upon ‘a form like the appearance of a man’, gleaming like precious metal above the waist and dazzling like fire below.²⁹ This is Yhwh, appearing again to the prophet. Strikingly, while the initial appearance occurred at the climax of the first vision (1:26-28), here the radiant figure appears without description of his accoutrements. In Ezekiel 1, the throne recedes when the prophet describes the figure seated upon it. Here, by noting the resplendent king first, the prophet relegates the throne to secondary importance. More important is direct engagement with the king. In turn, then, this suggests that the throne in 10:1 occurs in order to clarify the nature of Yhwh’s kingship. Examination of the cherubim confirms this.

3. The cherubim

Whatever the literary relationship between Ezekiel 1 and 10, the solitary (significant) difference between 1:26 and 10:1—mention of the cherubim—is

²⁸ Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 114.

²⁹ Joyce (*Ezekiel*, 98) states, ‘a marked continuity between ch. 1 and ch. 8 is clearly intended’, in spite of variances, e.g., here *והר* (‘brightness’), there *ננה* (‘brightness’).

noteworthy. And as intimated in the previous chapter (§4.3) the coincidence of cherubim and Yhwh's kingship begs further consideration.

3.1 'Enthroned upon the cherubim?'

Understandably, Ezekiel's vision of cherubim and Yhwh's throne has solicited comparisons with the scattered references to Yhwh 'enthroned among the cherubim' (יָשָׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים).³⁰ Among the most sustained treatments of this matter is Trgyve Mettinger's argument that Ezekiel co-opts motifs of kingship and cherubim in order to maintain Yhwh's kingship in the cataclysmic context of the temple's destruction.³¹ According to Mettinger, the temple theology held that Yhwh's throne was the ark of the covenant with its two cherubim. In the absence of the temple, Ezekiel created the cherubim-throne to preserve Yhwh's kingship. Mettinger documents his conclusion with careful analysis, but a re-evaluation of the phrase 'enthroned among the cherubim' suggests, to the contrary, that Ezekiel was wholly innovative in pairing cherubim and Yhwh's throne.³²

In the first place, the Hebrew יָשָׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים lacks a directional preposition.³³

The construct phrase is intelligible without the insertion. More

³⁰ E.g., Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 105, citing 1 Sam 4:4. The other instances are 2 Sam 6:2, 2 Kgs 19:15, Isa 37:16, Psa 80:1, Psa 99:1, 1 Chr 13:6 based on RSV.

³¹ Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 97-115.

³² Mettinger's reflections on Ezekiel draw heavily on his 'YHWH SABAOth—The Heavenly King on the Cherubim Throne', in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays: Papers Read at the International Symposium for Biblical Studies, Tokyo, 5-7 December, 1979* (ed. T. Ishida; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 109-138. Cf. *Dethronement*, 24-28.

³³ Though in Septuagint only 1 Sam 4:4 lacks the preposition ἐπὶ ('upon'). Cf. Joüon-Muraoka, § 12m.

problematically, however, Mettinger renders יָשָׁב as ‘to be enthroned’ when such a figurative sense of יָשָׁב is unnecessary and unsupported.³⁴ As Alice Wood explains, this misguided decision owes more to archaeological evidence than linguistic.³⁵ To be fair, many do read יָשָׁב with the gloss ‘to be enthroned’, e.g., A. Hulst noting Psa 2:4, ‘the one enthroned in the heavens’ (יֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם) and Psa 9:12, ‘enthroned on Zion’ (יֹשֵׁב צִיּוֹן).³⁶ M. Görg notes Akkadian and Ugaritic cognates with a similar royal nuance, and he points to 1 Kgs 1:13—‘Solomon your son shall reign (מָלַךְ) after me and he shall sit on my throne (יֹשֵׁב עַל-כִּסֵּאִי)—as indicating a semantic overlap between ‘to reign’ (מָלַךְ) and ‘to sit’ (יֹשֵׁב).³⁷

But neither Hulst nor Görg offer unassailable arguments. Nothing mandates a royal gloss for יָשָׁב in the psalms listed above; the non-royal ‘to dwell’ works equally well without stretching the evidence. The example of 1 Kgs 1:13 fails because here יָשָׁב abuts the obviously royal עַל-כִּסֵּאִי (‘on my throne’) as well as parallels מָלַךְ (‘to be king’). There is no doubt that יֹשֵׁב עַל-כִּסֵּאִי means ‘to be enthroned’. Further, invoking the comparative data to illuminate יָשָׁב amounts to etymological circular reasoning. Admittedly, Psa 9:12, describing Yhwh as יֹשֵׁב צִיּוֹן, appears in a thoroughly royal context, suggesting that here יָשָׁב may legitimately have a royal sense. The psalmist has

³⁴ Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 26.

³⁵ Wood, *Of Wings*, 11. Cf. the admission of as much from M. Görg, ‘יָשָׁב—*yāšab*,’ *TDOT*, 3:434.

³⁶ A. Hulst, ‘שָׁכַן—*škn*—to dwell’, *TLOT*, 6:1329. Ironically, here Mettinger glosses יָשָׁב as ‘to dwell’, *Dethronement*, 28.

³⁷ M. Görg, ‘יָשָׁב—*yāšab*,’ 3:421

already extolled Yhwh as one who ‘has sat on the throne’ and ‘has established his throne for justice’. Yet reading יֹשֵׁב צִיּוֹן as ‘the one enthroned in Zion’ flattens the psalm, assuming the psalmist is interested merely in Yhwh’s kingship rather than in the full presence of Yhwh with his people. In contrast, taking יֹשֵׁב צִיּוֹן as ‘the dweller of Zion’ maintains the rich texture of the psalm, providing a more robust understanding of Yhwh’s kingship.³⁸

Similarly, Psalm 61:8 pleads long life for the human king including that ‘he may יֹשֵׁב before God forever’. Again a majority read יֹשֵׁב as ‘to be enthroned’.³⁹ However, nothing requires this reading of יֹשֵׁב. Undoubtedly the royal sense derives from the basic gloss of ‘to dwell’, since a king who lives is (generally) a king who is enthroned. But, just as in Psa 9:12, an initial royal gloss levels the bold arc of the psalmist’s poem. As before, taking יֹשֵׁב as ‘to dwell’ gives stronger voice to the psalmist’s interest in the holistic well-being of the king, a note indicated by the plea for lovingkindness and faithfulness to guard the king.⁴⁰ Although a full assessment of יֹשֵׁב overextends the bounds of the present investigation, even this cursory study shows that a royal sense is hardly a given.⁴¹

³⁸ J. Goldingay, *Psalms, Vol. 1* (BCOT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 174.

³⁹ E.g., F.-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger who explain יֹשֵׁב less in royal terms than in terms of longevity drenched in Yhwh’s beneficence, *Psalms 2* (ed. K. Baltzer; trans. L. Mahoney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 108.

⁴⁰ Notably, LXX Psalms overwhelmingly renders יֹשֵׁב with κατοικέω, (‘to dwell’), though in Psa 61(60):8 the equivalent is διαμένω. In neither case does the Greek carry royal connotations.

⁴¹ Further support appears in Isa 10:13 (LXX 10:14). Here the king of Assyria boastfully claims ‘I bring down... יֹשְׁבֵי־הַכִּסֵּאִים’. RSV takes יֹשְׁבֵי־הַכִּסֵּאִים as ‘those who sit on thrones’. But LXX offers a more literal

In sum, the divine epithet יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים likely carries no royal significance other than what scholars have imputed to it.⁴² Since there is nothing inherently royal in the verb יֹשֵׁב, a more accurate rendering of יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִּים is ‘dweller of the cherubim’.⁴³ That is, just as Yhwh ‘dwells (יֹשֵׁב) among the praises of his people’ (Psa 22:3), so he also dwells among the cherubim.⁴⁴ In the mind of the ancient authors, Yhwh inhabits a space surrounded by Israel’s praise and the cherubim. Both praise and cherubim belong in Yhwh’s presence, but there is no reason to believe that either is essential to Yhwh’s dwelling place. Thus, the juxtaposition of cherubim and throne in Ezekiel 10 is an intentional insertion by the author of Ezekiel.⁴⁵ It is not merely an adaptation of an earlier belief that Yhwh’s throne was connected to cherubim.⁴⁶

3.2 Cherubim as protectors

The significance of this intentional coincidence of cherubim and throne deserves further attention, best provided by surveying what cherubim do in

κατοικουμένης earning support from many, e.g., G.B. Gray, *Isaiah 1-27* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 199 and B. Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Louisville: WJK, 2001), 88.

⁴² As A. Salvesen concludes, ‘it is hard to determine whether “sit enthroned” or “dwell” is intended by *yāšab*’, ‘The Trappings of Royalty in Ancient Hebrew’, in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. J. Day; JSOTSup 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 135.

⁴³ Wood, *Of Wings*, 14.

⁴⁴ Cf. C. Houtman, *Exodus* (3 vols.; HCOT; trans. S. Woudstra; Kampen: Kok, 1993-2000), 3.384-385.

⁴⁵ From a different angle, R. Knierim also draws this conclusion, ‘The Vocation of Isaiah’, VT 18 (1968): 47-68.

⁴⁶ As many have proposed, especially Mettinger, but also commentators such as W.H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC 28; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1986), 149.

other passages. In the Eden story the narrator states that Yhwh ‘placed the cherubim and a flaming sword to guard (שָׁמַר) the path to the tree of life’ (Gen 3:24). With no further detail, the terseness of this account suggests that ancient readers intuitively understood the referent of ‘cherubim’.⁴⁷ So, although brief, the narrative supports a provisional conclusion that cherubim provided protection.

Further evidence for the protective role appears in the verb ‘to overshadow, to cover’ (כָּבַד) that describes the action of the cherubim in each of these texts. For example, Exo 25:20 reads, ‘The cherubim shall have wings outspread above, overshadowing (כָּבַד) the mercy seat’. In its broadest sense, כָּבַד connotes the establishment of a barrier between two objects.⁴⁸ For example, Yhwh instructs Moses to screen (כָּבַד) the ark from the remainder of the tabernacle (Exo 40:3, 21) by hanging a veil in the tabernacle to divide the holy place from the most holy place. The separation here is vertical, a partition perpendicular to two parallel objects. Similarly, Yhwh says that, by erecting doors, he contained (כָּבַד) the sea at creation lest it overwhelm dry land (Job 38:8). But the same verb also refers to the action of creating a horizontal barrier. Thus, in Psa 91:4 the psalmist envisions Yhwh in ornithological terms: ‘with his pinions he will cover (כָּבַד) you’. Like a mother

⁴⁷ The LXX transliteration χερουβίμ and the NT χερουβίν (Heb 9:5) suggest that this understanding faded early.

⁴⁸ More specifically, this is כָּבַד I. The lexica do not agree on the number of כָּבַד roots in the HB; HALOT and DCH see three and BDB two. But there is consensus that כָּבַד I may be glossed as ‘to cover, overshadow or screen’.

bird shielding her chicks, Yhwh interposes himself between his devotees and their enemies.⁴⁹

A brisk look at Ezekiel 28 segues back to the juxtaposition of סכך and cherubim. Here Yhwh refers to the king of Tyre as an ‘anointed guardian cherub’ (כרוב ממשח הסוכך).⁵⁰ Ezekiel 28 is notoriously challenging to unpack, not least because LXX ‘with the cherub’ (μετὰ τοῦ χερουβ) states that the king of Tyre is not himself a cherub but only that he joined a cherub. But, as Jerome recognized seventeen centuries ago, the change from Hebrew to Greek makes little difference for understanding the role of the cherub.⁵¹ Whatever its association with the king of Tyre, the cherub is a guardian figure appointed to prevent unauthorized entrance to sacred space. What is more, as in Gen 3:24, the cherub of Ezekiel 28 serves at the behest of the deity.⁵²

These biblical descriptions of cherubim suggest that cherubim clearly acted as something like divine henchman. They effectively create a barrier between a designated space and all potential interlopers, a function emphasized by the regular conjunction of cherubim and the verb סכך. This protective role also provides rationale for the conjunction of golden cherubim

⁴⁹ Cf. Psa 140:8, ‘You covered (סכך) my head in the day of battle’.

⁵⁰ Ezek 28:14. In v. 17 the title is simply ‘guardian cherub’ (כרוב הסוכך).

⁵¹ LXX 28:14 7 omits mention of the cherub. For analysis, J. Barr, ‘Thou Art the Cherub: Ezekiel 28:14’, in *Priests, Prophets and Scribes: Essays on the Formation and Heritage of 2nd Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp* (ed. E Ulrich et al.; JSOTSup 149; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 221.

⁵² The cryptic statement that ‘Yhwh rode on a cherub’ (Psa 18:11//2 Sam 22:11) also depicts a cherub in service to Yhwh.

and the ark of the covenant, whether the cherubim built onto the ark itself (Exo 25:20, 37:9) or as freestanding structures surrounding the ark (1 Kgs 8:7, 1 Chr 28:18).⁵³ Since cherubim appear in Ezekiel 10 as an intentional (not merely traditional) component of Yhwh's throne, their function is likely protective. But, before settling on this possibility, arguments for the locomotive function of the cherubim deserve consideration.

3.3 Cherubim and the throne of Ezekiel 10

While the texts surveyed in the previous section allow that cherubim provided protection, the cherubim of Ezekiel 10 seem to provide divine transport since their movements dictate the movements of the wheels (vv. 16-17) and they seem to be designated as the bearers of Yhwh's throne (v. 1). What is more, Psa 18:11//1 Sam 22:11 explicitly links cherubim and locomotion, 'He [Yhwh] mounted upon a cherub and flew; he swooped on the wings of the wind'. Perhaps, then, Ezekiel 10 has expressed a belief that cherubim are a suitable vehicle for Yhwh's cosmic travel. Thus Wood posits two distinct functions for cherubim: transport and protection.⁵⁴ On closer examination, however, neither Psalm 18 nor the wheels of Ezekiel 10 permit seeing transport as a distinct cherubic task.

In Psa 18:11 the parallel of 'he mounted upon a cherub and flew' with 'he swooped on the wings of the wind' indicates that this juxtaposition of images communicates the swiftness of Yhwh's arrival to save the psalmist in

⁵³ For present purposes what the cherubim guarded is immaterial. For the mercy seat, U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 334-335. For the space above, Houtman, *Exodus*, 3.384.

⁵⁴ Wood, *Of Wings*, 138.

distress (v. 7).⁵⁵ Still, the parallel between ‘cherub’ and ‘wings of the wind’ bears unpacking, in order to understand how ‘cherub’ is a suitable vehicle. Psalm 104:3 offers the only other occurrence of ‘wings of the wind’, juxtaposing it with ‘the one who deems the clouds his chariot’.⁵⁶ This psalm celebrates Yhwh’s splendour exhibited in the created order and details his involvement with every realm of the natural world.

Similarly, Psalm 18 portrays the underworld (v. 7), the heavens (vv. 12-14) and the sea (v. 15) in subservient response to Yhwh, but, unlike Psalm 104, Psalm 18 trumpets Yhwh’s saving power, not his creative power. Yhwh’s flight on the cherub is a descent for battle against the psalmist’s enemies. Like the cherubim of Ezekiel 10, the cherub of Psalm 18 accompanies Yhwh on a military mission.⁵⁷ Psalm 104 has no need of this martial motif and thus pairs meteorological phenomena—‘wings of the wind’ and ‘cloud his chariot’.⁵⁸ The appearance of the cherub in Psalm 18 is not coincidental; in fact, it may be that the locomotive function of the cherub may be merely incidental, as the

⁵⁵ Alternatively, the focus could be Yhwh’s vehicle, if the sense of the verb רכב is the continuous notion of riding rather than the punctiliar of mounting. Cf. BDB, 938b. But this seems less likely in light of Hab 3:8—‘you rode (רכב) on your horses, your chariots of salvation’—where the single verb indicates that the vehicle is the focus. Cf. F.I. Andersen, *Habakkuk* (AB 25; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 318-19.

⁵⁶ The latter two cola of Psa 104:3 are clearly parallel but, this parallel appears to exclude the first line, ‘the one who lays the beams of his exalted home in the waters’. While perhaps an isolated clause, v. 3a may also function as a segue between v. 2b ‘he stretches out the heavens like a tent’ and the cloud-chariot image. In other words, vv. 2-3 derive coherence from the shared theme of Yhwh’s mastery over meteorological phenomena.

⁵⁷ Cf. H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59* (trans. H.C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 260.

⁵⁸ Admittedly, as explored above (Chapter 3, §5) a chariot is a military vehicle, but the context of Psalm 104 indicates that a combat connotation here is unlikely.

warrior Yhwh swoops upon his enemy like an eagle upon his prey.⁵⁹ In this single, explicit instance of a cherub functioning as transport, the context betrays the reason: Yhwh is at war.

Similarly, in Ezekiel 10, Yhwh battles the temple blasphemers who have rejected his kingship, but the cherubim's role as divine transport is doubtful. While the throne may rest upon them (v. 1), the text does not identify them as a vehicle for the throne's movement. Admittedly, their movements synchronize and even initiate the wheels' movements (vv. 16-17). But, since Psa 18:11 is of dubious value for certifying transport as a unique function of cherubim, their appearance here still begs the questions of what exactly cherubim do or why they occur here at all. In both passages, the cherubim are primarily associated with the military action of Yhwh against his enemies. The passages surveyed above suggest that the cherubim of Psalm 18 and Ezekiel 10 appear as divine defenders, serving at the will of Yhwh in order to prevent unwanted parties from intruding upon sacred space. In Psalm 18 this space is the space that Yhwh inhabits as he travels to rescue the psalmist, while in Ezekiel 10 it is Yhwh's throne.

In Ezekiel 10, the conjunction of cherubim and Yhwh's throne confronts the reader with the significance of Yhwh's throne. As Eichrodt observes, the narrative begun in Ezek 8:1 seems interrupted by the throne of 10:1, as though Ezekiel has lost interest in the grisly battle scene that features

⁵⁹This, of course, is a likely undertone of the verb נָסַח ('to swoop', 'to fly quickly') to which is related the noun נֶסֶח, ('bird of prey'), BDB, 178b. Deut 28:49, Jer 48:40 and 49:22 each have the eagle (נֶסֶח) as the subject of נָסַח, suggesting that Yhwh's swooping journey by cherub is hardly benign in Psa 18:11.

in Ezekiel 9.⁶⁰ His attention is initially swayed by the throne and subsequently held by the cherubim that secure the sacredness of the throne.

The cherubim of Ezekiel 10 witness to the significance of Yhwh's kingship, for without the cherubim, the solitary reference to Yhwh's throne would seem merely a recapitulation of the vision in Ezekiel 1. With the cherubim, though, Yhwh's kingship stands as the driving (though understated) theme in the vision of Ezekiel 8-11 because the cherubim, with their protective, martial role, highlight the link between Yhwh's throne and the battle for the temple. The military quality of Yhwh's kingship sharpens when Ezek 10:1 is contextualized within the narrative of Ezekiel 8-9.

4. Usurping Yhwh's abode

An initial reading of Ezekiel 8-9 shows up what may be termed 'cultic concerns'.⁶¹ Ezekiel 8 comprises four scenes, each portraying Judahites offering obeisance to deities other than Yhwh, and Ezekiel depicts a battle for ritual cleanliness.⁶² However, while understandable, attention to the religious

⁶⁰ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 112.

⁶¹ Ezekiel 8 is well-traversed territory as scholars have plodded through the four scenes with an eye to reconstructing the history of religion in ancient Israel. A majority see Ezekiel 8 as (relatively) reliable for historical reconstruction, e.g., S. Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth Century Judah* (HSM 46; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 48-99, and D.J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park: Pa.: University of Pennsylvania, 1993), 45-58.

⁶² M. Odell demurs, 'From beginning to end, the ritual [of Ezekiel 8] is an expression of confidence in Yahweh's faithfulness...', 'What Was the Image of Jealousy in Ezekiel 8?', in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets, and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets* (ed. L.L. Grabbe and A. Ogden Bellis; JSOTSup 408; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 145. Though well-argued, Odell's unique hypothesis is difficult to follow in light of Yhwh's fearsome fulmination in Ezekiel 9.

concerns of Ezekiel 8-9 tends to obscure the strong undercurrent of political concerns forming the backbone of this passage. While he surely judges religious failings, Yhwh engages the temple worshipers as an avenging king. His punishments are the martial actions of destruction by the sword; like a warring monarch he marshals his troops and routs the enemy.⁶³ Appreciating the political undertones here enables clearer recognition of the royal thread stretched across Ezekiel 8-11 and, in turn, how Yhwh's kingship functions throughout the book of Ezekiel.

However, as indicated by the programmatic vision in Ezekiel 1 and the reappearance of the gleaming deity-king in 8:2, Ezekiel 8 intimates an overlap between the cultic and the political. If Yhwh, the deity of Israel, merits a rich description as a political figure (cf. the language of rebellion in Chapter 3, §6.1) then Yhwh's kingship functions as an umbrella concept, subsuming ordinarily cultic activities and participants into his political sphere. To note this is simply to read with the grain of Ezekiel 8. Its political significance will continue to emerge throughout this study. For now, though, flagging its presence prompts continued openness in answering the question that drives Chapters 3-7, 'what sort of king is Ezekiel's Yhwh?'.

4.1 Scene one—the image of jealousy

Having captivated the prophet in a second 'divine vision' (v. 4), Yhwh directs Ezekiel's eyes to 'the image of jealousy' (סמל הקנאה) that occupied the north

⁶³ Cf. Chapter 8, §2.2.

gate of the inner court (v. 5).⁶⁴ Identifying this object has vexed many readers of Ezekiel 8, including the LXX translator who offered the unhelpful ἡ στήλη τοῦ κτωμένου ('the pillar of the buyer').⁶⁵ One option may be 'carved likeness of Asherah' erected by Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:7) and later remembered (2 Chr 33:7) as 'the carved likeness of the image'. Yet, 2 Chronicles also records that Manasseh eventually submitted to Yhwh by discarding the image (33:15). And, later still Josiah purged the carved images including those of Asherah (34:3-7). Even this scant evidence raises suspicions about the truthfulness of Ezekiel's experience with the image of jealousy. And some have concluded that this scene as well as the entire account of Ezekiel 8 is wholly fantastic, a story concocted to advance Ezekiel's theological agenda.⁶⁶

Still, Morton Smith defends Ezekiel's veracity, noting that, in Jeremiah 44, Judean refugees to Egypt claim to have continued libations to the 'queen of heaven' even after the first Babylonian deportations from Jerusalem, roughly concurrent with the assumed setting of Ezekiel 8.⁶⁷ Smith explains

⁶⁴ The notice of 'the image of jealousy' in two locations (vv. 3 and 5) displays something of the vexed editorial arrangement and complicated compositional history alluded to in §1.2. For more, Pohlmann, *Hesekiel/Ezekiel*, 128-134.

⁶⁵ For adequate explanation of this misreading J. Milgrom, 'The Nature and Extent of Idolatry in Eighth-Seventh Century Judah', *HUCA* 69 (1998): 1-13.

⁶⁶ Thus M. Haran's judgment that the image is 'some imaginary statue fancied by the prophet', *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 283.

⁶⁷ M. Smith, 'The Veracity of Ezekiel, the Sins of Manasseh, and Jeremiah 44 18', *ZAW* 87 (1975), 11-16. J. Blenkinsopp also takes Jeremiah 44 as supporting 'a recrudescence of native cults', a corollary to the vision of Ezekiel 8, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (2nd ed.; Louisville: WJK, 1996), 140.

that the earlier reforms of Manasseh and Josiah failed fully to exterminate polytheism from Judah, and thus Ezekiel's testimony is accurate. Dovetailing with this possibility, Harriet Lutzky proposed that textual corruption resulted in 'the image of jealousy' rather than the original 'image of the Creatress', a reference to Asherah.⁶⁸

Ultimately, however, settling the historical veracity of this scene (or the other three) is unnecessary and out of reach. Whatever its historical referent, the significance of the image of jealousy is largely transparent in its context. Presumably, the image of jealousy was a type of idol. The image was thus unequivocally a violation of Yhwh's rule (cf. Deut 4:16). What is more, the gravity of the infraction is implied by the word מוֹשָׁב ('seat' or 'dwelling'). So commonplace was this image of jealousy that it had become a fixture in the temple precincts and as such had usurped the rightful owner.⁶⁹ If Block is correct to suggest that מוֹשָׁב denotes a throne, then the image of jealousy is all the more offensive because, in this case, the image of jealousy would have explicitly challenged Yhwh's royal authority.⁷⁰ Regardless, as indicated by its moniker, this image competes with Yhwh for the loyalty of his people and thereby evokes jealousy in Yhwh.

⁶⁸ The argument hinges on a confusion of the homonymous verbs קָנָה, as in MT קָנָה ('jealousy'), and קָנָה ('to acquire, to create'), as in Psa 139:13, H.C. Lutzky, 'On "the Image of Jealousy" (Ezekiel VIII 3,5)', VT 46 (1996): 121-125.

⁶⁹ In 1 Kgs 8:27 Solomon recognized that Yhwh did not dwell (יָשָׁב) even in the highest heavens, but, with David (2 Sam 7:2), Psa 132:13 identifies Zion as Yhwh's dwelling place (מוֹשָׁב). Cf. W.A. Tooman, 'Ezekiel's Radical Challenge to Inviolability', ZAW 121 (2009): 511.

⁷⁰ Block, *Ezekiel*, 1.282. Though not noted by Block, a Qumran fragment (4Q405 20 ii 21-22 2) may substantiate his claim by paralleling מוֹשָׁב with כִּסֵּא ('throne'), Salvesen, 'כִּסֵּא', 53.

In specifying the location of the image of jealousy, ‘the north’, it seems that Ezekiel has inverted the motif of the mythological north that he employed in the opening vision.⁷¹ There, Yhwh came from the north in transcendent power. Now the image of jealousy stands at the north of the temple complex, augmenting the treachery of installing a non-Yahwistic image in Yhwh’s space.⁷² Further, in assigning a freighted location to the initial temple abomination, Ezekiel 8 suggests that the whole chapter belongs in the mythic realm. The deity-king who appeared in Ezekiel 1-5 as prepared to engage his rebel people now watches on location as his people continue to rebel.

Only this first scene of Ezekiel 8 lacks identified participants, suggesting that the image of jealousy introduces the whole of Ezekiel 8 by showing that treachery against Yhwh is widespread. While he defers a response to the image of jealousy until the battle of Ezekiel 9, even here he anticipates the consequences, remarking that the people are ‘driving themselves far from my holy place’.⁷³ In other words, the people’s treachery

⁷¹ Allen (*Ezekiel*, 1.119) notes but does not develop this possibility.

⁷² Jeremiah also mixes enemies and the north. In fact, the parallel with Jeremiah is all the more striking in light of the mediating position Ezekiel marshals. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel’s use of ‘the north’ in Ezekiel 8 treads between the extremes of wholly mythological and wholly real. In Ezekiel, neither category fully exhausts the combination of ‘the north’ and the treasonous Judahites, but allowing for a blend of both elements prevents the occurrence of these themes from being wholly coincidental. See D.J. Reimer, ‘The “Foe” and the “North” in Jeremiah’, *ZAW* 101 (1989): 223-232.

⁷³ This translation depends on reading the people as the subject of the infinitive absolute *לִדְחֹק* (‘to drive away’). Though the majority see Yhwh as the subject, K.L. Wong’s cogent argument for the minority opinion adopted here is compelling, ‘A Note On Ezekiel VIII 6’, *VT* 51 (2001): 396-400. Cf. Odell, *Ezekiel*, 107.

merits their expulsion from Yhwh's presence, for the king only accepts faithful subjects.⁷⁴

4.2 Scene two—the seventy elders

The second scene, vv. 7-13, shows Ezekiel viewing Israel's elite engaged in treasonous actions. Clawing his way through a wall, Ezekiel surreptitiously finds seventy elders wafting incense before 'every type of detestable creeping thing and animal' as well as 'all the idols of the house of Israel'.⁷⁵ Israel was forbidden from close contact with creeping things because they were unclean (Gen 7:8; Lev 20:25), thus causing ritual defilement (Lev 11:44) and preventing intimate interaction with Yhwh. But, of course, in this visional setting the injunction against defilement is secondary to the prohibition against offering obeisance to images (Exo 20:4), which is precisely what the elders do in waving incense.⁷⁶

Whereas the first scene named no participants, here the burden of this scene falls squarely upon the action of the elders, initiating a subtheme of the vision in Ezekiel 8-11 and throughout the book: Yhwh's confrontation of

⁷⁴ Any number of examples litter the Hebrew Bible, e.g., Saul hunts David, assuming that David is ambitious and thus disloyal to the king (1 Sam 18-19) and Jehu's path to kingship included the demand that loyal men join him (2 Kgs 10:6).

⁷⁵ K. Freedy takes כל־תבנית רמש ובהמה ('every form of creeping thing and beast') as an insertion to explain שֶׁקֶץ ('detestable thing'), 'The Glosses in Ezekiel', 150. This explains the anomalous construction with שֶׁקֶץ in apposition to other substantives. Elsewhere שֶׁקֶץ precedes its modifier (Lev 7:21) or predicate nominative (Lev 11:10) or stands alone (Isa 66:17). For another, plausible explanation, L.C. Allen, 'Some Types of Textual Adaption in Ezekiel', *ETL* 71 (1995): 27.

⁷⁶ As is well-known, iconism/aniconism in the Hebrew Bible is fraught with controversy. Recently, N. Macdonald, 'Aniconism in the Old Testament', in *The God of Israel* (ed. R.P. Gordon; UCOP 64; Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 20-34.

Israel's leaders. The number seventy intimates not that Ezekiel counted the elders while peering through the wall but that this scene represents a thorough-going critique of the elders.⁷⁷ Seventy suggests comprehensiveness; all the elders have rejected Yhwh's authority, submitting to other deities who, by implication, are rival authorities.

As with the image of jealousy in the previous scene, precise identification of the images and idols eludes present-day readers. Numerous proposals purport to solve the enigma with reference to various ancient Near Eastern cult practices.⁷⁸ Not surprisingly though, given the thin evidence in the text, none adequately accounts for the 'detestable creeping things and animals' within the unified setting of Ezekiel 8. While Haran may be correct to label the abominations as 'no more than realistic touches to fiction', the internal logic of Ezekiel 8 begs the reader to see the engraved images as rivals to Yhwh.⁷⁹ The link with the provocatively-named idols, 'dung-gods', supports this,⁸⁰ as also the pairing of 'dung-gods' and 'detestable thing' in

⁷⁷ Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 99.

⁷⁸ E.g., Greenberg tentatively sees five options, *Ezekiel*, 1.169. But Pohlmann asserts that these are hybrid animals especially like those from Egypt but similar to those found in Mesopotamian as well, *Hesekiel/Ezechiel*, 1.139.

⁷⁹ Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 284.

⁸⁰ D. Bodi demonstrates that the term גִּלּוּלִים in Ezekiel is a caricature of Israel's idols, 'Les gillûlîm chez Ézéchiél et dans l'Ancien Testament, et les différentes pratiques cultuelles associées à ce terme', *RB* 100 (1993): 481-510. The gloss 'dung-gods' connotes 'gods as valuable as dung'. No doubt the reader may imagine more concise epithets.

20:7-8 and 37:23.⁸¹ In other words, Ezekiel denigrates the pictures of creeping thing and beast because they, like the ‘dung-gods’ induce the elders to transfer their loyalty from Yhwh.⁸²

Perhaps predictably, this evaluation of the images has its detractors. Following her earlier work on the image of jealousy, Odell doubts that the images of 8:7-13 pose a threat to Yhwh’s authority.⁸³ Odell notes a paucity of extra-biblical parallels to what Ezekiel describes as well as possible parallels to seals from Iron Age IIB depicting goats and scorpions as joint symbols of the divine. She is loathe to identify these seals as Yahwistic but allows that they function as intermediaries permitting the elders to communicate with Yhwh, a judgment that she sees confirmed in the interpretive tradition represented in the Qumran *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. By Odell’s reckoning, the elders sling incense before the images and idols in an effort to communicate with Yhwh. Admirably, this explanation of what Ezekiel saw makes sense of the

⁸¹ Though without mentioning Bodi (previous note), J. Lust arrives at a similar conclusion via comparison with the LXX, ‘Idols? גִּלְזִים and ΕΙΔΩΛΑ in Ezekiel’, in *Florilegium Lovaniense: Studies in Septuagint and Textual Criticism in Honour of Florentino Garcia Martinez* (ed. H. Ausloos, B. Lemmelijn and M. Vervenne; BETL 224; Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 317-333. To Lust, the emphasis falls on the reprehensibility of the גִּלְזִים, rather than on their rhetorical function.

⁸² Textual developments plus the absence of clear ancient parallels lead S. Ackerman to posit that the ‘detestable things’ are foodstuffs laid out for a *marzēah*, a cultic feast in honour of deities, ‘A *Marzēah* in Ezekiel 8:7-13’, *HTR* 82 (1989): 267-281. But, ‘the detestable things’ are in parallel with ‘dung-gods’ and cannot legitimately be construed as food. Cf. J. McLaughlin, *The marzēah in the Prophetic Literature: References and Allusions in Light of the Extra-Biblical Evidence* (VTSup 86; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 196-205.

⁸³ M. Odell, ‘Creeping Things and Singing Stones: The Iconography of Ezek 8:7-13 in Light of Syro-Palestinian Seals and *The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*’, in *Images and Prophecy in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean* (eds. M. Nissinen and C.E. Carter; FRLANT 233; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 195-210.

elders' pronouncement, 'Yhwh does not see us; Yhwh has forsaken the land' (v. 12), a puzzling declaration since Yhwh has not actually abandoned his temple.⁸⁴

However, in spite of its initial attractiveness, Odell's reading of Ezek 8:7-13 falters by neglecting the visional narrative. Scenes three and four in this narrative depict non-Yahwistic deities within the temple precincts, and the image of jealousy is most likely a rival god as well. So, Odell's suggestion ruptures the otherwise patent thematic coherence of the vision. As already noted, the severity of the punishment meted out in Ezekiel 9 pleads an offense in this scene that transgresses Yhwh more radically than a failure to approach him directly, as Odell would have it.⁸⁵ That said, reverence paid to images of non-Yahwistic deities hardly accounts for Yhwh's claim that the elders' actions are 'vile abominations' (v. 9) that exceed the immorality of the image of jealousy (v. 6). But, the identity of the practitioners of this worship does.⁸⁶

In representing the people of Yhwh, the elders were responsible to some degree for facilitating the people's religious devotion.⁸⁷ At the outset of

⁸⁴ Cf. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 99.

⁸⁵ Odell, 'Creeping Things', 207.

⁸⁶ J. Skinner, *The Book of Ezekiel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895), 85. Cf. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 82.

⁸⁷ E.g., they plan to petition freedom from Pharaoh (Ex 3:18) and they request a king from Samuel (1 Sam 8:4). They orchestrated the first Passover meal (Ex 12:21) and, with Moses, urged obedience to Yhwh (Deut 27:1). For comprehensive analysis, H. Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel: A Study of a Biblical Institution* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989).

Chapter 4—The King at War

Israel's national existence seventy elders climbed Mt. Sinai to see 'the god of Israel' on his crystalline, sapphire dais (Exo 24:10) and to confirm their fealty to him. There they feasted with Yhwh, representing the people's acceptance of Yhwh's covenant.⁸⁸ But now, in Israel's (Judah's) twilight, the elders hide from Yhwh, dallying in the dark with mere images of deities, demonstrating disloyalty by claiming Yhwh's blindness.

Wallowing in Yhwh's (apparent) abandonment while reverencing Yhwh's rivals is evidence of the elders' rejection of Yhwh's authority.⁸⁹ Far worse, the elders' denial of Yhwh's vision betrays a misconception of Yhwh's identity and a refusal to know Yhwh. Undoubtedly, the impetus for the elders' action was the defeat and deportation 597 BCE, a catastrophic event that shook the pillars of confidence in Yhwh. But, as numerous texts suggest, the elders might have responded differently, e.g., the dialogical model of Habakkuk or the communal laments of Psalm 74 and 79.⁹⁰ Thus, their

⁸⁸ Making sense of the Sinai meal allows several options, e.g., consummating the covenant as J.J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 197 or worship of Yhwh, as E. W. Nicholson, 'The Origin of the Tradition in Exodus xxiv 9–11', *VT* 26 (1976): 148–60. N. Macdonald recently noted the thematic centrality of Yhwh's kingship, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 193–194. This final emphasis comports neatly with Ezek 8:17–13, as here the elders have denied Yhwh's kingship altogether, completing the reversal of their forebears.

⁸⁹ Introducing the elders' quotation, Yhwh says to Ezekiel, 'For they say (אמרו)'. The participle, rather than the perfect אמרו suggests that the elders employ this statement like a mantra, perhaps even while they burn incense to Yhwh's rivals.

⁹⁰ S. Mowinckel observes that these two psalms confront Yhwh with concerns for his reputation, thereby implying that the community remains faithful to Yhwh, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (2 vols.; trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), 1.204. Of course, this tack is the reverse of the elders'.

rebellion indicates a full detachment from Yhwh. No longer recognizing his rule, they have become his enemies, a stark reality borne out by the executions of Ezekiel 9.

As seen in Chapter 3, Yhwh's appearance to the prophet in Babylon asserted the deity-king's wide-ranging authority, and repeated characterization of Israel as 'rebels' indicated an awareness of his people's behaviour. In short, as the cosmic king, Yhwh saw his people, and the elders' claim otherwise belies their (wilful?) ignorance of Yhwh's identity. In the vision, Yhwh corrects this deficiency through the scourge of Ezekiel 9, which visionally anticipates the still-to-come sack of Jerusalem at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the one whom Yhwh claims as 'my sword' (cf. the interplay between Ezekiel 21:1-22, 30:25).⁹¹ The elders will see that Yhwh is king.

4.3 Scene three—the weeping women

In the third scene, vv. 14-15, Ezekiel sees 'women weeping for Tammuz', the only reference to 'Tammuz' in the Hebrew Bible. Numerous extrabiblical depictions designate women, in Frazer's classic words, displaying 'passionate demonstrations of sorrow' for a deity known variously as Tammuz or *Dumuzi*.⁹² But a century of research has reached little consensus about the deity's significance in the ancient world.⁹³ On the whole, however, it is clear

⁹¹ See also Chapter 8, §2.2.1.

⁹² J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, part III, *Dying Gods* (London: MacMillan: London: 1911), 7.

⁹³ The sizable literature also includes the important articles by O.R. Gurney, 'Tammuz Reconsidered', *JSS* 7 (1962): 147-160 and T. Jacobsen, 'Toward the Image of Tammuz', *HR* 1 (1961): 189-213.

that Tammuz was a deity whose capture by underworld minions purportedly coincided with the end of spring planting season. Mourning for his seizure was thus symbolic of sorrow for the imminence of punishing summer heat. Women led the cultic festivities for Tammuz as a way of continuing the mourning attributed to Inanna, Tammuz's wife who wept at his death.⁹⁴ Beyond this, though, the figure of Tammuz remains embroiled in controversy and speculation.⁹⁵

Not surprisingly then, accounts differ (if they exist at all) about why the Tammuz cult appears in the visional narrative of Ezekiel 8,⁹⁶ let alone which branch of Tammuz tradition is reflected here.⁹⁷ One perspective sees the mention of Tammuz as indicating the degree to which polytheism had infiltrated Judah.⁹⁸ Another locates Ezekiel's vision at the Sukkot festival of

⁹⁴ The Mesopotamian literary tradition of Tammuz and Inanna is highly erotic which may explain the link to fertility. See examples in G. Rubio, 'Inanna and Dumuzi: A Sumerian Love Story', *JAOS* 121 (2001): 268-274.

⁹⁵ For broad strokes of the debate, T.N.D. Mettinger, 'The "Dying and Rising God": A Survey of Research from Frazer to the Present Day', in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honour of J.J.M. Roberts* (ed. B.F. Batto and K.L. Roberts; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 373-386.

⁹⁶ Remarkably, many scholars offer no explanation of this matter, e.g., Block, Cooke, Greenberg and Pohlmann.

⁹⁷ For considerations regarding Levantine provenance, B. Margalit, 'The Myth of Tammuz in Biblical Narrative', in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism, Festschrift Shalom Paul* (ed. C. Cohen et al.; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 535, n.13. Yet B. Alster strongly situates Tammuz within Mesopotamia, 'Tammuz', in *DDD*, 828-834. And, a century ago, W.W.G. Baudissin observed that the single appearance of Tammuz in the HB occurs in a book riddled with Mesopotamian influences, *Adonis und Esmun: eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte des Glaubens an Auferstehungsgötter und an Heilgötter* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911), 110.

⁹⁸ J. Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah* (OTM; Oxford: OUP, 2005), 110-116.

593 BCE and assumes that each of the vision's scenes occurred at this time.⁹⁹

But, with characteristic pith, Eichrodt articulates a view closer to the mark:

'Here we see Yhwh being robbed of his right to control his land'.¹⁰⁰ Framing the problem as a power dispute begins to make sense of why Tammuz worship appears in the vision that opens with the gleaming figure of the deity-king (8:2) and that features the extended detail of the cherubim-guarded throne.¹⁰¹

As the previous scene (8:7-13) indicated, in the aftermath of the 597 Babylonian rampage, the people of Judah operated with the assumption that Yhwh had discarded them. With Yhwh's blessing removed, a successful harvest required another deity's assistance, and Tammuz was a worthy candidate. However, not only did Tammuz have jurisdiction over agriculture, but as a fertility god, he had power to give life to those in the throes of death.¹⁰² Although the damages inflicted in the 597 defeat paled in comparison

⁹⁹M. Dijkstra, 'Goddess, Gods, Men and Women' in *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes* (ed. B. Becking and M. Dijkstra; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 88.

¹⁰⁰ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 126.

¹⁰¹ Though Block sees the direct object marker as indicating that 'Tammuz' is a special genre of lament, *Ezekiel*, 1.294. Followed by Odell, *Ezekiel*, 110.

¹⁰² Thus a three-day festival in his honour at Neo-Assyrian Nineveh, S. Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University, 1997), XCIII. The death and resurrection element of the Tammuz saga is debated. B. Margalit cites texts suggesting its legitimacy, 'The Myth of Tammuz', 546, but Mettinger notes a broad shift against this element and a preference for referring to 'disappearing deities' or gods experiencing 'vicissitudes', "Dying and Rising God", 385-86.

with the destruction of 586, Nebuchadnezzar's forces still reduced Judah's hopes for prosperity by capturing many of the elite on whom she depended. Turning to Tammuz for assistance was thus a desperate move for survival. Admittedly, this explanation of Tammuz encounters the obstacle that the Tammuz festival typically occurred in June-July whereas, according to the vision's presumed setting, Ezekiel sees the worship in September.¹⁰³ But, as noted above (§1.3), the visional narrative of Ezekiel 8-11 does not purport to depict chronological reality according to contemporary standards.

The weeping women practice an abomination greater (v. 13) than the veneration of images in the previous scene because here Yhwh has been replaced by a figure considered to have a power to restore the loss incurred by the 597 defeat that Yhwh himself orchestrated. Ezekiel's description of this abomination is admittedly terse, stemming from an assumption that the text's audience understood the salient details.¹⁰⁴ In worshipping Tammuz, they spurn Yhwh, strengthening Yhwh's case that his people have become rebels (e.g., 2:3).¹⁰⁵

4.4 Scene four—the sun

The sequence of abominations climaxes with the fourth scene (v. 16). Here Ezekiel witnesses Yhwh's parade example of the people's rebellion and

¹⁰³ As noted by many, e.g., Block, *Ezekiel*, 1.296; Allen, *Ezekiel*, 1.137-141.

¹⁰⁴ In addition, mention of 'the women' (הַנְּשִׂאִים) suggests that Ezekiel sees a class of women not merely a randomly assembled group, M. Dijkstra, 'Women and Religion in the Old Testament', in *Only One God?: Monotheism in Ancient Israel and the Veneration of the Goddess Asherah* (ed. B. Becking et al.; BS 77; London: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 174. Some needlessly delete the article following LXX, e.g., Ackerman, *Every Green Tree*, 44.

¹⁰⁵ S. Olyan puts it well, 'All mourning behaviours function to separate the mourner ritually from society and the cult', *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), 35.

disloyalty, approximately twenty-five men prostrating themselves before the sun. The men face the sun as it rises from the east, their posture—backs to ‘the house of Yhwh’— poignantly suggesting what the tour of the temple seems geared to confirm: Yhwh’s people have turned from him.¹⁰⁶

What the sun represents is debated. Zimmerli cites the verbal economy of Ezekiel’s prose as proof that the men have not supplanted Yhwh so much as violated another command.¹⁰⁷ And Mark Smith argues that the impetus for Ezekiel’s prophetic critique is a purified Yahwism, not monotheism.¹⁰⁸ Both Smith and Zimmerli see the sun worship as a strain of Yahwism. Glen Taylor’s study supports this conclusion, mounting archaeological and textual evidence that at least a strand of Yahwism was syncretic, infused with solar elements.¹⁰⁹ Despite minor critique,¹¹⁰ a consensus following Taylor’s hypothesis has evolved so that the relevant question (to most scholars) is no longer whether Yhwh was associated with the sun but to what extent.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Ackerman overstates the case in seeing the worshipper’s posture as the *summum malum*, *Every Green Tree*, 98-99. To maintain the critique of the worship itself, it is better to see the posture as indicative or emblematic of the problem.

¹⁰⁷ More plausibly, says Zimmerli, Yhwh takes offense at the worshipers’ posture, *Ezekiel*, 1.243.

¹⁰⁸ M.S. Smith, ‘The Near Eastern Background of Solar Language for Yahweh’, *JBL* 109 (1990): 34.

¹⁰⁹ J.G. Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 111; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

¹¹⁰ S. Wiggins, ‘Yahweh: The God of the Sun?’, *JSOT* 71 (1996): 89-106.

¹¹¹ For more concise arguments than Taylor’s and artefactual support, O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, ‘Jahwe und die Sonnengottheit von Jerusalem’, in *Ein Gott allein? JHWH-Verehrung*

However, while a syncretic Yahwism may be likely in sixth-century Judah, the sun worship in Ezek 8:16 begs for a different interpretation. As already seen, Ezekiel critiques a culture of non-Yahwistic worship. Already the first three scenes of Ezekiel 8 have showcased examples of such worship, not least by the inflammatory term ‘dung-gods’ in Scene 2. The actions of the first three scenes are abominations precisely because they constitute a rejection and betrayal of Yhwh, not merely because they violate sundry legal prohibitions. Reading v. 16 as mere syncretism thus interrupts the coherence of the visional narrative. Were the sun worship merely solarized Yahwism, the elders’ pronouncement of Yhwh’s abandonment and blindness would be misplaced, and Yhwh’s promise of escalating abomination (v. 15) would be unfulfilled.¹¹²

The dynamics of Ezekiel 8, then, imply that the sun worship in v. 16 is an overt act of antagonism against Yhwh.¹¹³ Identifying a particular sun deity could provide more concrete explanation for how sun worship intensifies the reason of rebellious Israel.¹¹⁴ But the brevity of Ezek 8:16 limits insight into the substance of the sun worship that Ezekiel witnessed. The dynamics of Neo-

und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte (eds. W. Dietrich and M.A. Klopfenstein; OBO 139; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1994), 269-306. For updated bibliography, F. Zeeb, ‘Yahweh und die Sonnengott’, in *Ex Mesopotamia Ex Syria Lux: Festschrift M. Dietrich* (ed. M. Dietrich et al.; Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), 899-917.

¹¹² J. Middlemas’ worthy arguments for aniconism in Ezekiel falter by neglecting to address the matter of escalating abominations, ‘Transformation of the Image’, in *Transforming Visions*, 115-122.

¹¹³ Pace Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun*, 147-158.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Bertholet, *Hesekiel*, 33.

Assyrian religious politics, as well as Judah's earlier acceptance of Neo-Assyrian influence in the seventh century, allow the outside possibility that the sun worship consciously applies to the Mesopotamian deity Šamaš.¹¹⁵ Religious continuity spanned transfer of power to Babylonian dominance, permitting Nebuchadnezzar to ask of Šamaš, 'At your steadfast command...may a just sceptre, good shepherdship, and a steadfast rod to safeguard the people be my royal portion forever'.¹¹⁶ So the worship of an Assyrian deity under the Babylonian hegemony is hardly a problem. The fluidity of the vision even allows the possibility that, given his purported location in Babylon, Ezekiel views the sun worship as reverence of Marduk.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Suggestively, the Neo-Assyrians did not impose religion upon conquered peoples, S. Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (CHANE 10; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 200. But, voluntarily adopting Neo-Assyrian cult and deity was a point of prestige among some vassal elites, M. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 155.

¹¹⁶ 'To Shamash (1)', (B. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* [3rd ed.; Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2005], 848).

¹¹⁷ In Babylon, Marduk's prowess among the gods was longstanding, dating at least from the composition of *Enūma Eliš*, the literary masterpiece touting Marduk's superiority. The final tablet crescendoes as Marduk is identified with fifty other gods, subsuming them and obtaining supremacy, A. Seri, 'The Fifty Names of Marduk in *Enūma eliš*', *JAOS* 126 (2006): 507-519. A shorter text articulates Marduk's primacy by defining other gods in terms of Marduk, including 'Šamaš is Marduk of justice', CT 24 50, BM 47406, obverse, cited in W.G. Lambert, 'The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon: A Study in Sophisticated Polytheism', in *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (ed. H. Goedicke and J.J.M. Roberts; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1975), 197-198. And still other texts designate Šamaš as 'Marduk of judgment', [W.G. Lambert, 'An Address of Marduk to the Demons', *AfO* 17 (1954-1956), 313] and note that Marduk is made visible in Šamaš, [BM 55466, cited in A. Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford: OUP, 1986; repr., Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 90].

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However, if understanding the vision hinges on the likelihood (though not the historicity) of the practices occurring in Jerusalem, the international politics of the sixth century BCE caution against identifying the sun worship in v. 16 as worship of a Mesopotamian deity. After all, the puppet king Zechariah was no loyal supporter of his Babylonian overlord.¹¹⁸ Whether Lang is correct to see Ezekiel as pro-Babylonian, he rightly recognizes that Ezekiel excoriates Zedekiah for intending to sever political ties with Babylon.¹¹⁹ Equally, identifying the sun worship with Levantine or Egyptian deities, perhaps more likely in light of Judah's international politics, still requires ample substantiation. In the end, though, a specific deity is unnecessary to appreciate the increased severity of sun worship that provokes Yhwh's ire.

Within the book of Ezekiel, spatial politics is an important subtheme, not least here in 8:16.¹²⁰ Within the matrix of Judahite religious power, only priests had access to the inner court of the temple where Ezekiel witnessed the sun worship. Thus, the twenty-five men prostrating themselves to the sun are priests.¹²¹ They have commandeered the sanctity of Yhwh's space for paying homage to a lesser authority. As with the second scene of Ezekiel 8, the identity of the participants intensifies the severity of the abomination.

¹¹⁸ For survey of this history, R. Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 54-55. Cf. Jeremiah 27-28, Ezekiel 17, 2 Kgs 24:28-25:7.

¹¹⁹ Lang, *Kein Aufstand*. Eichrodt's (*Ezekiel*, 127) notion of attempting to appease Babylonian overlords is thus unlikely. On Babylonian allegiance in Ezekiel, Chapter 8, §§3.1, 5.2.

¹²⁰ The vision of Ezekiel 40-48 demonstrates this most clearly, as noted in Chapter 7, §4.2.

¹²¹ Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 1.243) calls this 'conjecture', but he provides no argument or replacement.

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Priests bore responsibility for guarding Yhwh's space, a point that Yhwh emphasizes and corrects when the fullness of his reign bears upon his people (Ezekiel 44, cf. Chapter 7, §3.3.2). And these priests have shown themselves wholly unreliable in their duty to care for the well-being of the whole (cf. 22:26). Of all members of Judahite society, the priests should have rejected the impulse to transfer their loyalties from Yhwh. Yet not only have they committed treason within the royal space of the temple's inner court, they have also embodied the degradation of Jerusalem.

This final scene of the visional temple tour aggravates Yhwh more than the actions of the earlier scenes, as indicated by absence of the formula 'you will see greater abominations' (vv. 6, 13, 15) that followed the first three scenes. Here Yhwh's people have committed a final atrocity, an abomination that, more conclusively than before, demonstrates that their loyalty to Yhwh has dissolved. Representing the corporate whole, the priests have prostrated themselves to the sun deity in the space surrounding the most consecrated part of the temple complex. In essence, then, they have nullified their relationship with their divine king, essentially claiming for themselves a new identity. No longer people of Yhwh, they are now people of the sun deity. They have dismissed Yhwh, rejecting his authority and submitting themselves to Yhwh's rivals. This is sedition by the deity-king's most trusted servants.

4.5 Ezekiel 8 in sum

The priests, of course, were cultic officials. But, as already noted, the vision of Ezekiel 8-11, like Ezekiel 1-5, opens with a glimpse of a shimmering king, and the subsequent events of the vision are bathed in his splendour. So, what is ordinarily cultic also becomes political. Since Yhwh is the supreme power,

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those who broker access to him are power legitimators. The priests are thus political. The temple is not merely sacred space; it is the realm of the king. Worshipers of Yhwh are faithful citizens; indeed, they demonstrate their fealty by maintaining the king's standards.

Yet, following the dismal characterization of Israel in Ezekiel 2-5, the temple abominations confirm the expected: Yhwh's people are not faithful. Rather, from the outer court to the inner, rebellion reigns. The people as a whole, including her leaders, have rejected Yhwh for a veritable pantheon. Again, outside the political context of the book of Ezekiel, the four scenes of non-Yahwistic worship would merit classification as cultic crimes. But the radiance of the deity-king streams across these scenes, illuminating them in a political glow. From the image of jealousy to the sun worship, Ezekiel 8 displays the rebellion of Israel and thus the catalyst for the deity-king's judgment.

5. The king at war

Yhwh responds to the temple abominations with swift power, beginning with the verdicts of 8:17-18 and concluding with the judgment of Ezekiel 9-10.

Yhwh's response invalidates the peoples' transfer of loyalty and authenticates his kingship, showing that this king tolerates no treason.

5.1. Verdict one—the 'light' thing

Prior to displaying his royal power, Yhwh responds verbally to the treasonous actions (v. 17): 'Is it a light thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here? For they have filled the earth with violence, and they have provoked me to anger still more'.

Yhwh observes that the house of Judah considers the abominations of Ezekiel 8 trifling matters. But to Yhwh, each action is weighty. His logic is that:

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- a) Judah would have abstained if they had viewed the temple abominations as serious.
- b) They did not abstain.
- c) Therefore, they prove themselves ignorant of the seriousness.

The temple abominations confirm the people's perfidy. Prior to the temple tour, Yhwh reprimanded the leaders of Judah for their acts of injustice—crimes of violence with which they filled the land, e.g., 7:11, 23. Now, he arraigns them for treason. They have rejected him, forswearing faithfulness to him and binding themselves to his rivals.

Nevertheless, some scholars see Yhwh's central concern in v. 17 as the violence—'they have filled the earth with violence', since 9:9 blames crimes of violence for the judgment of Ezekiel 9.¹²² Undoubtedly, reference to violence tightens the literary weave of these early chapters in Ezekiel, and Mein in particular argues that societal violence is a major component of the prophet's case against Judah.¹²³ Indeed, 7:23 reads, 'Make a chain, for the land is full of blood and the city is full of violence'; an abundance of brutality is sufficient cause for the coming judgment. So, as the standard argument goes, the cultic crimes detailed in Ezekiel 8 only intensify the need for Judah to be punished.¹²⁴

But a closer look at v. 17 tells a different, more complex story. While 7:23 and 9:9 peg political violence for the imminent judgment, 8:17 lays the blame at the feet of Judah's insubordination to Yhwh. Both sets of misdeeds,

¹²² Ezek 9:9 echoes 8:17b: 'the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of perversion'. Thus Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.172 and Block, *Ezekiel*, 1.298.

¹²³ Mein, *Ethics of Exile*, 95-99.

¹²⁴ E.g., Odell, *Ezekiel*, III-II2.

not just the violence, necessitate Yhwh's judgment. In the Ezekielian logic, the exercise of Yhwh's power in Ezekiel 9 occurs in response to both cultic and political offenses. To Ezekiel, the political is the cultic, and the cultic is the political since Yhwh is both Judah's god and her king. In short, v. 17 illustrates Yhwh's melded identity. Four syntactical matters clarify that Yhwh's chief complaint in 8:17 lies with the treasonous abominations, not the violence.

1) The thing that is 'light' to the Judahites is the 'committing' (עֲשֹׂה) of abominations. The infinitive construct עֲשֹׂה rather than the participle עֹשֶׂה as in vv. 6, 9, 12, 13 and 9:4, portrays the action of committing abominations abstractly.¹²⁵ In turn, this narrows the conceptual focus to the entire assembly of actions, both those committed during and before the vision.

2) In the subordinate clause 'which they have committed (עֲשֹׂה) here', the specific verbal form is again important. The participle עֹשֶׂה could have sufficed and might even have heightened the literary unity of the passage. But, the perfect עָשָׂה more securely allows Yhwh to indicate that the committing of abominations has been a practice of some longevity.¹²⁶ The protractedness of the practice only compounds the people's guilt.

3) In the clause, 'for they have filled', the particle 'for' (כִּי) plus the perfect verb (מִלֵּא), signals the rationale for Yhwh's allegation that his people

¹²⁵Cf. Joüon-Muraoka, §124a.

¹²⁶Reading עָשָׂה with past-perfect time referent comports with the earlier repetition of the participle that suggested Ezekiel and Yhwh were witnessing a mere cross-section of the temple treason, rather than actions that coincidentally occurred during the vision.

have trivialized the temple crimes.¹²⁷ They have already reneged on his law by failing to maintain justice; they ‘have [already] filled (מלאו) the land with violence’. By Yhwh’s implicit logic, in spite of the social injustice already offending Yhwh, Judah might have avoided the abominations, if she had viewed them as weighty rather than light. Yet piling up violence contributed to the disintegration of Judah’s loyalties, inducing them to devalue the importance of devotion to Yhwh alone. In other words, after the violence, the temple abominations were a *fait accompli*.

4) The phrase ‘they have provoked me to anger still more’ (וַיִּשְׁבוּ לְהַכְעִיפוּנִי) again makes use of the subtleties of the Hebrew verbal system.¹²⁸ The *wayyiqtol* form וַיִּשְׁבוּ reports an action discrete from the multiplying of violence. The temple abominations are a return to provocation, implying that the people have already provoked Yhwh by their violence. Had Yhwh intended to state that filling the earth was the sole goad to anger, the more natural form would have been שָׁבוּ.¹²⁹ But the *wayyiqtol* form creates a consecution in the action of the people’s offense against Yhwh so that the multiplication of violence is separate from the provoking.

¹²⁷ Here כִּי introduces the evidence for the exclamation ‘Is it such a light thing...’. Also, 1 Kgs 1:24-25 and 1 Sam 26:15. W.T. Claassen labels this use of כִּי as a ‘speaker-orientated causal function’, ‘Speaker-Orientated Functions of *Ki* in Biblical Hebrew’, *JNSL* 11 (1983), 43. In other words, כִּי occurs here to give Yhwh’s explanation for the temple abominations.

¹²⁸ Alternatively, וַיִּשְׁבוּ לְהַכְעִיפוּנִי might be translated ‘and they returned to provoke me to anger’. Under this reading, the text might envision that the practitioners of temple abomination engaged in a cycle of violence and abomination, committing atrocities in the city and then returning to the temple to flout Yhwh. The translation above has the advantage of following the usage of שָׁבוּ in 8:6 and 8:15. Cf. BDB 998a.

¹²⁹ ‘Wayyiqtol is also avoided if the second action is simultaneous...’, Joüon-Muraoka, §118f.

In asking ‘Is it a light thing...’, Yhwh justifies his verdict against Judah (v. 18). The people have demonstrated that paying allegiance to deities other than Yhwh is a trifling matter. Collectively, the four scenes of abominations reflect a failure to ascertain the weightiness of their rebellion against Yhwh. Or, put another way, they no longer recognize Yhwh as their authority, their king. The explicit mention of the ‘house of Yhwh’ in vv. 14 and 16 suggests that Ezekiel is at pains to show that Yhwh has been usurped.¹³⁰

5.2 Verdict 2: the ‘branch to the nose’

By usurping the king’s house, the aggressors of Ezekiel 8 demonstrate that they have rescinded their relationship with Yhwh and aligned themselves with his enemies, thereby also becoming his enemies. Noting this transfer of loyalty unlocks the cryptic phrase of v. 17c, ‘behold, they are putting the branch to their nose’.¹³¹ The gesture of placing branch to nose resembles several ancient practices, but, as has been long-recognized, these connections are often imprecise.¹³² Greenberg likely speaks for the majority, noting that a

¹³⁰ Verse 16 refers to the temple first as בית-יהוה but then also to as היכל. The significance of this variation deserves further examination in light of royal resonances in the latter term, all the more given the context and its occurrence elsewhere in the book only at Ezekiel 41-42.

¹³¹ Masoretic tradition holds the word אַפִּם (‘their nose’) as a correction for an original אִפִּי (‘my nose’) but the purported original is grounded more in scribal speculation than textual tradition. The MT אַפִּם thus stands. C. McCarthy, *The Tiquene Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament* (OBO 36; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1981), 91-97. Cf. E. Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 65-67.

¹³² Cf. C.F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Ezekiel* (2 vols.; trans. J. Martin; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1876), 1.125. Into this category fall the proposal of Baal worship from M. Sands, ‘A New Interpretation of “Vhinam shol’him ’et-ha-z’morah ’el-’apam” (Ezekiel 8:17)’, in *Bits of Honey: Essays for Samson H. Levey* (ed. S.F. Chyet and D.H. Ellenson; Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 113-119 and of flatulence from Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 128.

branch to the nose is deeply offensive but that '[t]he specific sense is beyond us'.¹³³

However, in light of the thematic coherence of Ezekiel 8, the suggestion of H.W.F. Saggs merits renewed attention. Saggs argued that Ezek 8:17 refers to the well-attested Mesopotamian practice known as *labān appi* that often accompanied a devotee's petition to his god.¹³⁴ Saggs specifies further, seeing a rite of a fertility cult that links the sun worship to the weeping for Tammuz. However, caution applies here, since the syntax of v. 17 and the patterning of the narrative, imply that placing branch to nose is not an additional, fifth offense so much as a way of encapsulating the whole behaviour.¹³⁵ In this regard, a relevant artefact is the relief of Sennacherib on the Bavian cliffs above the irrigation canal that he oversaw for Nineveh.¹³⁶ The king of Assyria stands with his right hand bringing a branch-like object to his nose, and the inscription identifies this as 'my royal image engaged in a gesture of entreaty' (*labān appi*) set up before 'the great gods my lords'.¹³⁷

¹³³ Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.172.

¹³⁴ H. W. F. Saggs, 'The Branch to the Nose', *JTS, New Series*, 11 (1960): 318-329.

¹³⁵ Cf. R. Gordis, "'The Branch to the Nose": A Note on Ezekiel viii 17', *JTS* 37 (1936): 285. Also, Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 1.244.

¹³⁶ On the relationship of the carving to the canal, see recently, J. Ur, 'Sennacherib's Northern Assyrian Canals: New Insights from Satellite Imagery and Aerial Photography', *Iraq* 67 (2005): 339-343.

¹³⁷ *OIP* 2, 84: 54-56, quoted in M. Gruber, 'Akkadian *labān appi* in the Light of Art and Literature', *JANES* 7 (1975): 78.

The significance of the Bavian Inscription is its clear depiction of *labān appi* without the characteristic prostration and with the inclusion of a stick-like object in the king's hand.¹³⁸ What is not clear, however, is the meaning of the gesture. Gruber, following Stephen Langdon, contends that, the Bavian Inscription uses *labān appi* in the sense of 'affection and praise'.¹³⁹ Yet Gruber's argument is opaque, and the supporting text he marshals clarifies little regarding this explanation of *labān appi*. Another option, however, is that the Bavian carving depicts Sennacherib in a posture of reverence and self-abasement, entreating the gods to secure and prosper his construction.¹⁴⁰ If so, the Bavian Inscription accords with literary instances of *labān appi*. For example, Esarhaddon claimed: 'By means of prayers, lamentations and humble gestures [*labān appi*], I implored Aššur the king of the gods and the merciful Marduk...'.¹⁴¹ As a gesture of 'humility and intensified begging for mercy' the practice of *labān appi* expressed the supplicant's utter submission, even subjugation, to the god whom he entreated.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Establishing this against his interlocutors is the burden of Gruber, 'Akkadian'. Cf. Saggs, 'Branch to the Nose', 321, and A. Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament* (trans. B.E. Hooke; London: SCM, 1958), 141.

¹³⁹ Gruber, 'Akkadian', 80. S. Langdon, 'Gesture in Sumerian and Babylonian Prayer: A Study in Babylonian and Assyrian Archaeology', *JRAS* 51 (1919): 535.

¹⁴⁰ M. Cifarelli, 'Gesture and Alterity in the Art of Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria', *TAB* 80 (1998): 217.

¹⁴¹ 'Esarhaddon's Rise to Power', lines 35-37, M. Nissinen with contributions by C.L. Seow and R.K. Ritner, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (ed. P. Machinist; WAW 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 138.

¹⁴² Cifarelli, 'Gesture and Alterity', 216.

If Ezek 8:17 indeed refers to the *labān appi* rite, the use of the word ‘behold’ to introduce Yhwh’s accusation is appropriate for its expression of urgency.¹⁴³ Yhwh recognizes that the men and women who formerly sought him have utterly capitulated to his rivals. As a summarizing exclamation, Yhwh’s statement does not mean that the temple worshipers have literally brought branch to nose. It is, rather, a figurative expression of their thoroughgoing commitment to other deities and thus their desertion of Yhwh. To Yhwh the temple abominations constitute a sustained practice of putting branch to nose, humble gestures demonstrating their loyalty but not to Yhwh.

Admittedly, evidence adduced here for this Mesopotamian practice is Neo-Assyrian, not Neo-Babylonian, thus raising the question of how Ezekiel would know about the practice. On the one hand, Ezek 8:17 may represent a rite actually practiced in Jerusalem, but this is clearly a matter beyond proving. Alternatively, as a priest and member of the Jerusalem elite Ezekiel may have been exposed to a range of practices and literature.¹⁴⁴ Already, the mention of Mesopotamian practices in Ezekiel 8, let alone the remainder of the book, suggests this breadth of awareness.¹⁴⁵ Or, the branch to nose may simply be

¹⁴³ A recent analysis of הנה is C.H.J. Van Der Merwe, ‘A Cognitive Linguistic Perspective on הנה in the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges and Ruth’, *HS* 48 (2007): 101-140.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. K. Sparks, “Enūma Elish” and Priestly Mimesis: Elite Emulation in Nascent Judaism’, *JBL* 126 (2007): 625-648.

¹⁴⁵ In this regard, worth noting again is Kutsko’s acclaimed *Between Heaven and Earth* in which an elaborate comparative analysis requires Ezekiel to have detailed knowledge of Neo-Assyrian literary patterns. Cf. Chapter 1, §5.

an impenetrably cryptic offense. Accepting either interpretation requires a measure of creativity to explain the branch to the nose, but the parallel with the *labān appi* rite more adequately expounds the theme of Ezekiel 8. Yhwh's subjects have disposed of his authority. What remains is for him to display his power by punishing their treason, and, in so doing, to validate himself as the legitimate king.

5.3 The judgment

Yhwh's response to the offenses committed against his divine royalty turns from verbal to physical as the verdict turns to judgment. However, before initiating the punishment for treason, Yhwh states in 8:18, 'Therefore, I will act in wrath'. In restating the verb 'to do/act' (עשה), this pronouncement correlates directly with v. 17 and its earlier counterparts that described the temple treason explicitly in terms of what the people were 'doing'. Yet here the independent pronoun 'I' underscores that the agent has changed. The people have acted. Now Yhwh will act. This is the deity-king's declaration of war, and in 9:1 he unleashes an unstoppable attack, showing his superiority to the impostors. Tammuz and the sun god are worthless things now; the images are impotent to fight Yhwh. With this scene, Ezekiel disqualifies all pretenders to Yhwh's temple (and thus his throne), for Yhwh alone has authority and power.

Yhwh's royal authority emerges starkly as he announces, 'Bring near the overseers of the city, each with his weapon of destruction in his hand' (v. 1). Greenberg rightly notes that here the verb 'bring near' (קרב) resonates

in a royal register.¹⁴⁶ Similar instances of the regal imperative occur from the lips of Joseph, the vice-regent of Egypt as he directed court affairs (Gen 43:31, 45:1). And Solomon used this verbal form for summoning the sword as he judged the case of the two prostitutes (1 Kgs 3:24). Here, Yhwh, the mighty king who first confronted Ezekiel from the basket of a war chariot, commands his elite forces, six men prepared to perform Yhwh's bidding (v. 2). The king has begun to fight.

Explaining the relationship between the 'six men' (v. 2) and the 'overseers of the city' (פקדות העיר v. 1) has perplexed many readers of Ezekiel.¹⁴⁷ But one Rabbi Chisda was no doubt correct to reject any real disjunction between the men and the overseers.¹⁴⁸ In commanding these men, Yhwh again proves his superiority. Although connoting punishment, the term פקדה is also a title for officials with jurisdiction over the temple or palace affairs.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.175, reading קָרַבּוּ as Piel imperative rather than as Qal perfect with LXX ἡγγαγεν. Block (*Ezekiel*, 1.300, n.1.) notes that Targum and Syriac also reflect the Piel. Wevers (*Ezekiel*, 84) objects that a Piel reading makes the verb transitive. But Piel קָרַבּ takes an object in Isa 41:21 where קָרַבּוּ is clearly Piel and not Qal since it parallels the Hif הוֹנִישׁוּ. Also, Isa 46:13 and implied in Psa 65:4.

¹⁴⁷ Bodi surveys several options, *Poem of Erra*, 96-107.

¹⁴⁸ b. *Shabbat* 55a, cited in Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 175. Greenberg himself, among other scholars, sees seven overseers, counting the man clothed in linen and arguing for a symbol of completion. But, even if the man in linen is a seventh overseer, he is not a destroyer. As K.L. Wong rightly notes, his role is preservation and protection, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel* (VTSup 87; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 175. Pace S.S. Tuell's position that the mark merely marks those belonging to Yhwh but confers no security, 'The Meaning of the Mark: New Light on Ezekiel 9 from the History of Interpretation', in *After Ezekiel*, 186-202.

¹⁴⁹ For the connotations of woe, Cf. Isa 10:3, Jer 6:15, 8:12, 10:15, Hos 9:7, and Mic 7:4. For the temple, 2 Kgs 11:18, Ezek 44:11. For the palace, Isa 60:17, 2 Chr 24:11.

Chapter 4—The King at War

In Ezek 9:1, the designation *פקדות העיר* likely reflects this latter role since a sphere of authority—the city—is specified.¹⁵⁰ Here, almost in passing, is another indication of how Ezekiel conceives of Yhwh's kingship. As the commander of the 'overseers of the city', Yhwh is identified as an authoritative political figure, which, in the context of the Ezekiel 8-11, is a king.¹⁵¹

Like the motif of rebellion in Ezekiel 2-5, Yhwh's interaction with the overseers registers his kingship as more literal than figurative. Here Yhwh's kingship deals with the public validation of power. That is, as king, Yhwh directs the overseers who stem the rebellion in the city, presumably effecting a recognition of Yhwh's authority. Although communicated through a vision, the implication is no less clear: Yhwh alone exercises power.

The overseers' 'weapon of destruction' (v. 1) further develops Yhwh's royal persona. The fighters carry a 'war club' (v. 2). Although occurring only here, the sense of both 'destruction' (*מַשְׁחָה*) and 'war club' (*מַצֵּי*) is clear from cognates, which, suggestively, appear in context of political battle. Elsewhere, announcing Babylon's doom, Yhwh commissions the kings of the Medes, 'You are my war club (*מַצֵּי*), a weapon of war; I shatter (*נִפֵּי*) nations with you

¹⁵⁰ Recognizing that the overseers function as assassins, several scholars gloss the Hebrew as 'executioners', e.g., Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 102 and Bodi, *Poem of Erra*, 95. But this translation misses the subtlety of the term and, consequently, its reflection on Yhwh. Cf. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 84.

¹⁵¹ Space constraints prevent exploration of the scribe (vv. 2-5) as another indication of royalty except to note relevant discussions in Y. Avishur and M. Heltzer, *Studies on the Royal Administration in Ancient Israel in the Light of Epigraphic Sources* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publication, 2000), 55 and N. Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah* (MHUC 23; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 2000), 96-107.

and I destroy (שחת) kingdoms with you' (Jer 51:20). Yhwh's target in Ezekiel 9 may be smaller than in the similar passage of Jeremiah 51, but the political dimension is undiminished. After all, the visional city of Jerusalem is a political entity, the seat of public power.¹⁵²

The visional destruction of Jerusalem is retribution (9:9) that demonstrates Yhwh's authority and power. Responding to the prophet's horror at the destruction (9:8), Yhwh reprises 8:18, 'As for me, my eye will not look in compassion'.¹⁵³ Here, with heavy irony, Yhwh provides a strong counter to the people's claim that 'Yhwh does not see' (8:12, 9:9), a contradiction underscored by the weighty phrase, 'as for me'.¹⁵⁴ Far from blind, Yhwh sees all, as evidenced by the temple tour in Ezekiel and now the battle of Ezekiel 9. The 'seeing' motif confirms that, as a mighty king, Yhwh sees his people and metes out justice, in order to show his people that their king rules in power.

Viewing the judgment of Ezekiel 9 as a display of royal authority eases some of the editorial tension caused by the abrupt transition to the throne and cherubim in Ezekiel 10. If Ezekiel 9 validates Yhwh's kingship, then the shift in 10:1 underscores this validation.¹⁵⁵ The throne itself is a royal emblem,

¹⁵² Cf. Chapter 3, §6.2 and especially Chapter 7, §§2.4, 4.4.

¹⁵³ The phrase also occurred in conjunction with 'I will not pity', in 5:11, 7:4, 7:9

¹⁵⁴ T. Muraoka argues that the independent pronoun, particularly with 'also' (גם) is not emphatic but an anaphoric feature of Late Biblical Hebrew, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), 65. However, in both 8:18 and 9:10 the phrase 'as for me' (אֵלַי) cannot be anaphoric since the preceding verse took a different subject than Yhwh. A measure of emphasis seems likely after all.

indicating that, in directing the overseers of the city to purge the rebels, Yhwh has acted as a king, and the cherubim highlight the character of his kingship. This is no passive king like Jehoiachin carried into exile, nor is Zedekiah's kingship comparable, since he is propped up by Nebuchadnezzar. Rather, and perhaps ironically, Yhwh is a king like the Babylonian overlord who suppresses rebellion and maintains his exalted status.

6. Confirming kingship

As noted at the beginning of this chapter (§§1.2-1.3), debate swirls regarding the relationship between Ezekiel 11 and Ezekiel 8-10. Aside from the vision's closing sequence in 11:22-25, Ezekiel 11 appears misplaced, since here Yhwh engages leaders of Jerusalem after his decisive victory against the rebels. One wonders why Ezekiel 11 depicts a confrontation of more rebellious leaders. Did they survive the battle? Were they not present?

The simplest solution, of course, regards Ezekiel 11 as juxtaposed uncomfortably with the preceding material. This notion may have considerable merit, but, since tradition has presented the text in this arrangement, presumably there was a rationale for its inclusion¹⁵⁵. Since Yhwh's kingship permeates the 'divine vision', it is no leap to see Ezekiel 11 under this thematic umbrella as well. Albeit unexpectedly, Ezekiel 11 focuses Yhwh's kingship towards the political sphere. As he engages twenty-five elders at the east gate of the temple complex, Yhwh demonstrates the

¹⁵⁵The burning coals scattered upon the city (10:2) may be a separate punishment or a refiguring of Ezekiel 9. For discussion, Wong, *Idea of Retribution*, 170. Either way, the defeat of Yhwh's enemies is certain.

¹⁵⁶Pohlmann provides balanced discussion of these matters, *Hesekiel/Ezekiel*, 128-134, 157-158.

superiority of his leadership. This validates the inclusion of the chapter within the larger textual unit and within the present study of Yhwh's kingship.

6.1 Yhwh the butcher king

Framed as a duel between Yhwh and the leaders, Ezekiel 11 emphasizes Yhwh's superiority. Like a skilled fighter, Yhwh attacks quickly, labelling the leaders 'men who devise iniquity and give wicked counsel in the city' (v. 2). He also mobilizes the prophet for the fight, supplying Ezekiel with a verbal artillery (v. 5) that castigates Israel's leaders for plotting self-serving abuse.¹⁵⁷ Yhwh labels the victims of the leaders' murderous plot with the same word used to describe the victims of Yhwh's own purgation in 9:7, 'the slain' (חללים), perhaps indicating that the civil leaders bear some responsibility for the catastrophe of Ezekiel 9. Yhwh will bring the elders to justice, reversing their cleverly devised plots.

The ironic twist of Yhwh's judgment is delicious. Whereas the leaders devoured their defenceless citizens like stew meat, Yhwh himself will slaughter the leaders, leaving their carcasses as carrion for carnivorous foreigners (v. 9). Yhwh's use of butcher imagery is rhetorically effective in cutting down the leaders' pomposity and building his own kingship.

In context of the butcher motif, his selected tool, חרב, refers to a butcher's knife. But it is more commonly a weapon of battle, such as a sword.¹⁵⁸ The conjunction of חרב and the political terms 'foreigners',

¹⁵⁷ More than the temple tour of Ezekiel 8, the scene of Ezekiel 11 has led several scholars to believe that Ezekiel audibly addressed the gathered leaders. Since present space precludes adequate discussion, see the apt summary and analysis in McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 35-40.

¹⁵⁸ O. Kaiser, 'חרב—hereb', *TDOT*, 5.155-165.

‘judgments’ and ‘border’ (vv. 8-11) belie a political thread that runs deeper than the butcher imagery. Yhwh casts himself as both the master-butcher who will carve rebel flesh and (again) as the warring king who marauds against his enemies. Yhwh demolishes the leaders of Jerusalem, flattening their self-importance and supposed power by promising to slaughter them in retribution for the slaughter that they have already orchestrated.

The political thread also appears as Yhwh summarizes the leaders’ foundational fault. He says in v. 12, ‘And you shall know that I am Yhwh in whose statutes you have not walked and whose judgments you have not performed’ (וידעתם כי־אני יהוה אשר בחקי לא הלכתם ומשפטי לא עשיתם). Here Yhwh expounds the faults of the people in light of his own identity so that the violation of statute and judgment is seen as a direct affront to Yhwh himself. The leaders have not merely disobeyed a law code; they have rebelled against a lawgiver.¹⁵⁹ They have disregarded Yhwh’s kingship by substituting the practices of their neighbours for Yhwh’s legislation (v. 12) and thereby (tacitly) pledging their loyalty to the lawgivers of these nations.

Again, the political tone of Yhwh’s kingship demands to be heard. While Yhwh is Israel’s deity, in this passage he styles himself as Israel’s king, adding to the suspicion that the throne of 10.1 sends royal ripples throughout the vision. Laws (here, ‘statutes’ and ‘rules’) are political instruments for exercising and regulating authority, and submission to laws indicates

¹⁵⁹ Again an important theme for Yhwh’s kingship. Chapter 7, §.51 establishes lawgiving as a royal function, and Chapter 8, §4 considers several other texts that posit Yhwh’s kingship through legal material.

submission to the lawgiver. In contrast, rejection of laws constitutes rebellion, which, as seen in Chapter 3, is an inherently political concept. What is more, here Yhwh describes Israel's rebellion as the acceptance of her neighbours' rule. The treasonous actions of Ezekiel 8 styled the rebellion in primarily cultic terms, commensurate with Yhwh's identity as Israel's god, but here the political defiance appears in more overtly political terms. Accordingly, the prescribed punishment will be political devastation: judgment 'at the border of Israel' (vv. 10, 11). Yhwh is a warrior king 'who brooks no rival and requires loyal obedience'.¹⁶⁰

6.2 Yhwh the ideal leader

As a guarantee of this punishment, Pelatiah, son of Benaiah dies (v. 13), once again provoking Ezekiel to bemoan the fate of his compatriots. But Yhwh's ensuing response contrasts sharply with the similar situation narrated in 9:8-10 because, rather than confirm the legitimacy of his violence as he did earlier, Yhwh now promises salvation.

Although unfamiliar, the note of hope blends nicely with Yhwh's chastisement of the Jerusalem leadership.¹⁶¹ Whereas 11:2-13 demonstrate Yhwh's superior power, 11:14-20 show the superiority of Yhwh's covenant faithfulness. With their respective foci, both panels of Ezekiel 11 trumpet the superior suitability of Yhwh's leadership. To understate the case, the Jerusalem leaders have failed to promote the welfare of their constituents. In contrast, Yhwh promises to establish the people in the land. The leaders have

¹⁶⁰ Quoting C. Sherlock who nonetheless misses the royal resonance of the warrior motif in Ezekiel, *The God Who Fights: The War Tradition in Holy Scripture* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1993), 187.

¹⁶¹ Of course, as Joyce discusses, this may evidence textual development, *Ezekiel*, 109.

promoted behaviour that disregarded the kingship of Yhwh, aligning themselves instead with the lawgivers of the surrounding nations. Yhwh, however, will ensure that the people respect his laws. The critique of the Jerusalem leadership is unmistakable on this front, for Yhwh has already denounced them for failing to walk in his statutes and to perform his judgments (v. 12). In mimicry of the leaders' failings, Yhwh now promises that the people 'will walk in my statutes and keep my judgments' (v. 20). As if to solidify this promise, Yhwh inverts the people's action. No longer will they 'do' abominations as in Ezekiel 8; now 'they will do' Yhwh's commandments. As the undisputed ruler of his people, Yhwh himself will ensure obedience. He is the king.

Conclusion

In spite of editorial complexities, the vision of Ezekiel 8-11 presents a largely homogenous picture of Yhwh's kingship, cued by the appearance of the gleaming king (8:2) and his throne (10:1) that the prophet first saw in Ezekiel 1. The major difference, though, is that Ezekiel 1 identifies 'living creatures', while Ezekiel 10 specifies the same beings as 'cherubim'. This change lends a militaristic quality to this second vision, dovetailing with the initial vision of a Yhwh parading in his war chariot. In turn, Ezekiel's Yhwh becomes more complex. In the first vision Yhwh appeared as a king confident of his status as exalted monarch, but in Ezekiel 8-11, that confidence translates into battle prowess as Yhwh directs his militia. As seen, those six men discharge their duty to 'oversee the city' by following Yhwh's orders, thereby subtly highlighting Yhwh's political authority.

Chapter 4—The King at War

Of course, what precipitated Yhwh's fulmination in Ezekiel 9 was the tour of temple treason in Ezekiel 8. Seen in light of the radiant king (Yhwh) who initiates the tour, the interface with the non-Yahwistic deities constitutes rejection of Yhwh's authority and brands Yhwh's people as traitors. The encounter of Ezekiel 11, heightens this rebellion by uncovering the elders' delinquent leadership. In castigating the existing power structures, Ezekiel's Yhwh appears as a superior political entity.

Yhwh is undoubtedly a religious figure, and he relates to his people in the cultic sphere. Hence, he states in 11:20 'they will be my people, and I will be their god'. Yet, as both Chapters 3 and 4 have now shown, Ezekiel's Yhwh is not isolated to the cultic sphere. If Ezekiel 1-5 and 8-11 are any indication, cultic concerns may not even be primary to Ezekiel's Yhwh. Rather, in the book of Ezekiel, Yhwh appears as a dominant king engaged in the task of subduing errant vassals. From this perspective, then, even the quintessentially religious dictum in 11:20 is political power-brokering, as both Yhwh and the people are assigned roles in a formal relationship that revolves around the authority of the chief party—Yhwh.

This chapter enriches the depiction already encountered in Chapter 3. In short, Yhwh appears as a transcendent king intent on utter loyalty from his people. Although turning on cultic actions, Ezekiel 8-11 adds further evidence that the motif of kingship in the book of Ezekiel stems from a conviction that Yhwh is the chief figure engaged in the legitimate, public use of power in Israel. In other words, Yhwh is Israel's political leader. He is undoubtedly her god, but he is also her king. Chapter 5 now maintains and develops this picture.

CHAPTER 5—THE KING’S PROMISE (EZEKIEL 20)

1. Introduction

After Ezekiel 1-5 and 8-11, the third overt statement of Yhwh’s kingship occurs in Ezek 20:33, ‘As I live—declaration of Yhwh—surely with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath, I will reign as king over you’. In the book of Ezekiel, here alone does Yhwh identify himself with the standard appellation for a monarch.

Yhwh’s ambition to kingship initially appears insignificant, dampened by the dominance of cultic offenses. However, as with Ezekiel 8-11, a closer look at the passage shows that Yhwh’s kingship occupies a central position. Far from insignificant, the utterance of 20:33 functions as the corrective to the problems of Israel’s history, and Yhwh’s role as the sole royal figure intimates that a merely metaphorical reading of Yhwh’s kingship may be myopic.

1.1 Focus

Scholarly investigation of Ezekiel 20 has focused on two tricky topics: Yhwh’s unexpected description of Israel’s history and Yhwh’s admission ‘I gave them laws that were not good’ (v. 25).¹ By contrast, the dynamics and implications of Yhwh’s ambition for kingship have received little attention. Undoubtedly, the history account and the ‘bad laws’ are the most obviously challenging facets of the chapter. After all, Yhwh’s version of Israel’s history diverges sharply from other accounts in the Hebrew Bible, and the notion of Yhwh intentionally inhibiting obedience smacks of injustice, if not outright tyranny.

¹ On the question of Israel’s history, most recently, T. Krüger, ‘Transformation of History in Ezekiel 20’, in *Transforming Visions*, 159-186.

Both issues deserve the attention scholars have lavished. However, here as before, the main interest lies in how and why Ezekiel's Yhwh wears royal garb. These tricky topics, then, will only receive attention as subsets of the larger discussion.²

1.2 Approach

On its face, Ezekiel 20 appears to be a single literary unit, as indicated by the boundary markers of a date notice (20:1) and reception formula (21:1) as well as by the coherent message from Yhwh to Israel's elders.³ Exploring the chapter-wide import of Yhwh's royal declaration (v. 33) thus meets little initial resistance. However, a closer examination finds textual fissures that suggest Yhwh's kingship may not permeate the entire literary unit after all; the final form of the text appears artificial if not forced.⁴

A majority of scholars see an original core in the history of vv. 5-26, on account of the three, stylized panels that present Israel's history as a cycle of stereotyped events.⁵ According to this reading, the remaining verses

² See §2.2 below on Israel's history and Chapter 8, §4.2 on the laws.

³ J. Mol notes that the LXX translator read the chapter as a whole, registering no division between vv. 31 and 32, *Collective and Individual Responsibility: A Description of Corporate Personality in Ezekiel 18 and 20* (SSN 53; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 60.

⁴ However, note the nuanced approach of S. Ohnesorge that first considers the chapter as a unity, then evaluates various strata, and finally reexamines the chapter as a unity in light of the individual segments, S. Ohnesorge, *Jahwe gestaltet sein Volk neu: zur Sicht der Zukunft Israels nach Ez 11, 14-21; 20, 1-44; 36, 16-38; 37, 1-14. 15-28* (FB 64; Würzburg: Echter, 1991), 78-202.

⁵ As catalogued and analysed in L.C. Allen, 'The Structuring of Ezekiel's Revisionist History Lesson (Ezekiel 20:3-31)', *CBQ* 54 (1992): 448-462. Contrast F. Sedlmeier, who extends the original oracle to v. 39a, *Studien zu Komposition und Theologie von Ezechiel 20* (SBB 21; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990).

constitute textual accretions, the most notable of which is vv. 32-44. As Adrian Graffy argues, vv. 32-33 introduce a prophetic disputation speech, and Yhwh's royal exclamation in v. 33 is a retort intended to stifle the people's ambitions to 'be like the nations...and serve wood and stone' (v. 32).⁶

Among others, Wevers observes that the editorial insertion of vv. 32-44 was only marginally successful in wedding the two sections; the expectation of deliverance (vv. 32-44) seems to clash with the promise of judgment and the recitation of wrongs (vv. 1-31). Thus Wevers concludes that the second section 'presuppose[s] a situation quite foreign to a pre-586 date, as verse 1 demands'.⁷ However, whatever its merits for explaining the textual history of Ezekiel 20, this conclusion has the baleful influence of severing Yhwh's kingship from its literary context. The impulse to isolate vv. 32-44 derives largely from an insistence on assigning texts to predetermined categories of prophetic speech.⁸ Some sort of division at v. 32 is obvious from the change of focus, but whether this redirection may be linked legitimately with a different occasion than the elders' inquiry (v. 1) is wholly uncertain.⁹

Still, the insights of form-criticism are valuable for understanding the dynamics of the chapter, and, ironically, provide rationale for maintaining a literary unity. For example, as a literary category, Graffy's 'disputation

⁶ A. Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts His People: The Disputation Speech in the Prophets* (AnBib 104; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1984), 65.

⁷ Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 151.

⁸ As exemplified in Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 1.404.

⁹ Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 82.

speech' helpfully illuminates the interplay between vv. 32-33. Clearly, Yhwh's design on kingship (v. 33) counters the people's plan to assimilate with their neighbours by 'serving wood and stone'. He disputes and rejects their desire to exert autonomy, and, as argued below, in this way Yhwh presents the antidote to the persistent rebellion that has marked Israel's history.

However, Johan Lust proposes another possibility, namely, that vv. 32-44 constitute a prophetic statement of salvation that has been affixed to the condemnatory oracle of vv. 5-26. Admittedly, vv. 32-44 hardly look like a standard salvation oracle.¹⁰ Compared with the consolation assured in Jeremiah 31 or Isaiah 43, the end of Ezekiel 20 appears more a continuation of the promised judgment that concludes each episode of Israel's history earlier in the chapter (vv. 8, 13, 21). At the same time, in Ezekiel, Yhwh's other pledges to redeem Israel lack the unequivocal tenderness of the poignant Jeremiah and Isaiah passages noted above.¹¹

So, for example, Ezek 11:14-21 promises hope but then reiterates that the wicked will suffer punishment. And Ezek 16:59-63 states that Yhwh's goodness will evoke shame and silence the sinners. The lengthiest oracle of salvation, Ezek 36:22-38, includes the line 'you shall loathe yourselves' (v. 31). And even in the evocative vision of restored skeletons (Ezek 37:1-15) Yhwh

¹⁰ J. Lust, 'Ezekiel Salutes Isaiah: Ezekiel 20:32-44', in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah: Festschrift Willem A.M. Beuken* (ed. J. Van Ruiten and M. Vervenne; BETL 132; Leuven: Leuven University, 1997), 369, 372.

¹¹ R. Albertz, 'How Radical Must the New Beginning Be?: The Discussion between the Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel School', in *The Centre and the Periphery: A European Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. J.A. Middlemas, D.J.A. Clines, and E.K. Holt; HBM 27; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 7-21.

reminds the people that his favour is intended to rehabilitate his own reputation.¹² The book of Ezekiel thus wholly lacks the jubilation characteristic of the roughly contemporaneous words of Isaiah 55:12—‘you will go out in gladness’ (v. 12).

The similarity of Ezekiel's salvation statements suggests the viability of seeing an Ezekielian idiom of salvation.¹³ And, couched in this idiom, Ezek 20:32-44 offers good news to those suffering the darkness of diaspora since the prospect of Yhwh's kingship within their historic land is preferable to suffering Nebuchadnezzar's rule in Babylon.

Seeing vv. 32-44 as an Ezekielian salvation oracle supports reading Ezekiel 20 as a literary whole. For, although promising salvation from foreign rule, Yhwh's threatening tone in vv. 32-44 maintains and thereby subtly develops the earlier verses. The stitching of vv. 32-44 to the first part of Ezekiel 20 adds substance to Yhwh's engagement with the elders. This development is crucial to the rhetorical force of Ezekiel 20 because in vv. 32-44 Yhwh promises a specific action in response to the elders, rather than merely denying them.¹⁴ Further, the substantive response of vv. 32-44 enables a closer parallel with 14:1-11 when Yhwh encountered inquiring elders only to

¹² In other words, as Joyce convincingly showed, Ezekiel presents a theocentric picture of restoration, *Divine Initiative*, 89-124.

¹³ C. Westermann. *Prophetische Heilsworte im Alten Testament* (FRLANT 145; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 129-142.

¹⁴ Cf. L.M. Eslinger, ‘Ezekiel 20 and the Metaphor of Historical Teleology: Concepts of Biblical History’, *JSOT* 83 (1998): 100.

reject their appeal and promise action.¹⁵ Thus, in order to make sense of the literary dynamics in the chapter itself and in order to tighten the literary weave of the entire book, Ezekiel 20 is legitimately maintained as a coherent section.

2. Context

Before focusing on Yhwh's royal claim (v. 33), a sketch of the literary context will provide a robust picture of the kingship to which Yhwh aspires. Given the absence of consensus on the structure of Ezekiel 20, a broad, three-part structure will be suitable for now.¹⁶ For now a look at only the first two parts (vv. 1-4, 5-31) is necessary.

2.1 Elders seeking Yhwh

While Ezekiel 20 centres on the historical failings of national Israel, the addressees of this history lesson are not the people but the elders, standing for the whole of the people. As they have failed, so too the people.¹⁷ As earlier (Ezekiel 8-11, 14), then, the elders bear Yhwh's displeasure for their inadequate leadership, and, on account of their role as societal power brokers, their failure is inherently political. Yhwh's claim to royal office (v. 33) only renders this more explicit by highlighting the power differential between Yhwh and the elders. Yet even before Yhwh pronounces his superior power, the elders' purpose for visiting Ezekiel—'to inquire of Yhwh' (v. 1)—signals

¹⁵ Zimmerli admits that Yhwh's response in Ezekiel 14 is surprising, but he accepts its integrity after a form-critical analysis, *Ezekiel*, 1.305.

¹⁶ Cf. Allen, 'History Lesson'.

¹⁷ Cf. Duguid, *Leaders of Israel*, 117-118 and Sedlmeier, *Studien*, 162-63.

their subservience to Yhwh, for they, not Yhwh, need aid.¹⁸ Although perhaps a stylized feature of the narrative, their posture—sitting before Ezekiel—also indicates that they rank lower than Yhwh.¹⁹ From the outset of the narrative, then, the elders appear as merely leaders *de jure*. Yhwh is the leader *de facto*, and he will exercise authority, not the elders.

In v. 3, Yhwh responds to the elders: ‘Is it to inquire of me that you are coming?’ (v. 3).²⁰ The ensuing oath indicates that Yhwh hardly seeks information. Instead of granting an audience, then, Yhwh rejects the elders’ attempt to inquire of him because they resemble their ancestors who committed ‘abominations’ (v. 4).²¹ Here the cultic content of Ezekiel 20 is prominent. But the dynamics of power indicate that Yhwh’s declaration of kingship is rooted in a political framework. Yhwh’s refusal to countenance the elders signals that he has passed judgment upon them; he has

¹⁸ Numerous passages urge inquiry of Yhwh, e.g., Hos 10:12, Amos 5:4-6 and 14. And failure to seek Yhwh is condemned, e.g., Isa 31:1, 65:1, Jer 10:21, Zeph 1:6. For brisk evaluation of this practice, E.E. Fleming, “She Went to Inquire of the Lord”: Independent Divination in Genesis 25:22’, *USQR* 60 (2007): 3-6.

¹⁹ This dynamic also permeates Ezek 14:1-11 where a similar situation occurs. Notably, the analogous instances of seeking Yhwh through a prophet do not mention the inquirers sitting before the medium. Ahab and Jehoshaphat are explicitly seated on thrones when Micaiah visits them (1 Kings 22), and Hazeal stands before Elisha (2 Kgs 8). Cf. 2 Kgs 3:11, 2 Kgs 22:14ff, Jer 21:2.

²⁰ Speculations abound regarding the nature of the elders’ request. Block lists five possibilities, *Ezekiel*, 1.618-619. But, in spite of scholars’ best efforts to hear the specifics of the request, the passage is silent about what the elders want.

²¹ Compare Hos 5:5-7, 15 where Yhwh denies Israel’s leaders from seeking him (יִשְׁׁקֹץ not בִּקְשׁ as here) ‘until they acknowledge their guilt’. Also Ezekiel 14.

discriminated between rebels and faithful subjects.²² To explain his rejection, Yhwh unleashes a torrent of history in which he characterizes the elders' ancestors as rebels who wilfully pursued their own way, rather than submitting to his rule. As intimated in the rebel motif explored in Chapter 3, Yhwh only permits inquiries from those who actively recognize his authority, a point borne out in detail by the history lesson of vv. 5-26.

2.2 Israel's history

Much scholarly ink has attempted to explain the sketch of Israel's history in Ezek 20:5-26.²³ The most pressing concern has been explaining why Yhwh's account diverges so radically from the traditions of Israel's history enshrined in the Torah.²⁴ For example, Ezek 20:8 indicates that Israel rebelled against Yhwh *while* he was delivering them from Egypt. But Exo 12:50 reports emphatically that 'all the Israelites did as Yhwh commanded Moses. Thus

²² O. O'Donovan traces the theme of judgment as the essential function of political authority, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). With narrower scope, K. W. Whitlam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 12; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980).

²³ In addition to commentaries, e.g., J. Lust, *Traditie, redactie en kerygma bij Ezechiël: een analyse van Ez., XX, 1-26* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1969) and T. Krüger, *Geschichtskonzepte im Ezechielbuch* (BZAW 180; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 228-260.

²⁴ The other major issue has been the link between Ezekiel 20 and the Pentateuchal legal traditions of Deuteronomy (D) and the so-called Priestly document (P). But discussion of this virtually intractable problem goes beyond present interests. R. Levitt Kohn recently proposed that Ezekiel drew on both D and P in order to create a literary *tertium quid*, *A New Heart and A New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile and the Torah* (JSOTSup 358; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002). But the judicious comments on Levitt Kohn from Joyce (*Ezekiel*, 37-38) substantiate the intuition that further work on Ezekiel and D will still be helpful. M. Lyons has offered a noteworthy study of Ezekiel and the Holiness Code (H), *From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel's Use of the Holiness Code*. (LHBOTS 507; London: T&T Clark, 2009). A similar treatment of Ezekiel and P remains outstanding.

they did'. And Exo 14:31 affirms that 'the people feared Yhwh, and they trusted Yhwh and his servant Moses'. Thomas Krüger is no doubt correct to see this divergence not as a falsification of past events but as a retelling that contributes to Yhwh's indictment of his people.²⁵ Read as a polemic against Israel, Ezek 20:5-26 sets up the royal declaration of v. 33. This is seen clearly in the overtly political language and narrative sequence of the passage.

2.2.1 Political language

Not surprisingly, religious themes form the backbone of Yhwh's account of Israel's history; after all, the nation's origins emerged from her deity's insistence on receiving worship.²⁶ But, as seen in Chapter 4 above, Yhwh's royal identity exerts an influence that converts cultic notions into political. Ezekiel 20 also displays language that is overtly political. For example, Yhwh describes Israel's unwillingness to abandon her 'detestable things and dung gods' as rebellion (vv. 8, 13, 21).

Rebellion, of course, is a denial of Yhwh's legitimacy as an authority, an infraction in itself worthy of Yhwh's displeasure. Compounding the rebellion, Israel not only rejected Yhwh's authority but aligned herself with other deities. And a further indication of the political character of Israel's crimes turns up in the corrective to this rebellion. In Ezekiel 20, a repristination of Israel or a rolling back of her offenses (as in 11:19, 36:26) is

²⁵ Krüger, *Geschichtskonzepte*, 259. In this respect, Ezekiel 20 mimics the polemical portrayals of Israel's history in Ezek 16:1-43 and 23:11-30. *Pace* Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.363.

²⁶ At least according to the accounts of the Hebrew Bible. A scholarly consensus on Israel's origins remains elusive, as represented by the divergent stories of Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient' Israel* and I. Provan, V.P. Long, T. Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, (Louisville: WJK, 2003).

wholly absent, nor is there even mention of Israel being ashamed of her wrongdoings (as in 16:63, 43:11). Rather, the solution to persistent sin—rebellion—is an enforcement of Yhwh's authority via an exertion of his kingship. The emphasis lands upon the political, suggesting that Yhwh's kingship is something more than a metaphorical depiction of his authority.

Further still, the whole of Israel's national history and thus her relationship with Yhwh is marked by this political dynamic of rebellion. Each of the three cycles in vv. 5-26 identifies Israel's failing as a refusal to submit to Yhwh's rule. At first glance, the terminology of legislation—statutes (חֻקִּים) and rules (מִשְׁפָּטִים)—appears cultic, not least because both here and elsewhere these terms often converge with the cultic vocabulary of 'profane' and 'sanctify'.²⁷ Accordingly, the reader of Ezekiel 20 may be predisposed to see legislative vocabulary as cultic rather than political. However, there is no inherent justification for reading these terms apolitically, and the coincidence of Yhwh's kingship and his lawgiving suggests that the law functions as a corollary of the political office of king. Since Chapter 7, §5 will press these concerns more fully, anticipating the later discussion is sufficient for now: the legal vocabulary of Ezekiel 20 strengthens the political thread by portraying Israel's sins not simply as unholiness—a thoroughly cultic concern—but, more fundamentally, as repudiation of authority, a political matter.

2.2.2 Narrative sequence

As with Ezekiel 1, attention to the narrative sequence of Ezekiel 20 also draws attention to Yhwh's royal declaration. Ezekiel 20 layers two narratives in

²⁷ Compare the legal vocabulary of Ezekiel 20 to Lev 18:4-5, Lyons, *From Law to Prophecy*, 128.

order to communicate Yhwh's response to the elders who attempt to inquire of him. On one level, the prophet recounts the events that are dated to the seventh year of exile (v. 1).²⁸ On another, Yhwh tells the story of Israel's history (vv. 5-26), present (vv. 27-32) and future (vv. 33-44). Tellingly, Yhwh's statement of kingly ambition arises after he subtly tars the elders with the same brush with which he has just painted the previous generations as inveterate rebels (vv. 30-32). The elders' forefathers demonstrated their disloyalty to Yhwh by their insubordination, and Yhwh holds the elders (and their generation) as equally rebellious, bent on pursuing their own lawlessness rather than following Yhwh's directives.

Admittedly, Yhwh does not explicitly condemn the elders for rebelling against him. But the question 'will you defile yourselves in the ways of your fathers?' (v. 30) follows the torrent of indications that the fathers' ways opposed Yhwh's legislation. The assumption, then, is that the elders and their generation are on course to flout Yhwh's laws as well. That is, in their own cultic violations, the elders, like their fathers, commit a political offense.²⁹ This is confirmed by Yhwh's mention of 'detestable things' and 'dung gods'.³⁰ In referencing these cultic offenses, Yhwh mimics his earlier reference to them in

²⁸ The fullest, most recent treatment of the date is Mayfield, *Literary Structure*, 105-107.

²⁹ Yhwh parallels the interrogation about defilement with 'and will you whore after their detestable things? (v. 30).' Whether the verb 'to whore' (זנ) carries covenantal and thus political connotations is an open question answered affirmatively by R. Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery: Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3* (SSN 40; Assen: van Gorcum, 1999), 255, and negatively by S. Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* (OTM; Oxford: OUP, 2008), 43-46.

³⁰ Cf. Pohlmann, *Hesekiel/Ezekiel*, 2.304, n.15.

the context of giving the laws to the Exodus generation (vv. 11-12). There, he had indicated that the persistence of cultic offenses among the escapees from Egypt was a motivation for his promulgation of the law. Now, in again noting the detestable things and idols, Yhwh shows that the elders are like their ancestors. Both the ancient fathers and the present-day sons fail to submit to Yhwh's authority, and, as the narrative sequence of Ezekiel 20 suggests, only the exercise of Yhwh's kingship will enable and ensure submission.

Within Yhwh's narrative of Israel's national life, the placement of the royal declaration is significant so that, regardless of whether v. 32 opens an originally distinct textual unit (as discussed in §1.2 above), the statement of kingship clearly fits its context. Block puts it well, 'The people's determination to be like the nations meets with an equally resolute response from Yahweh'.³¹ At the same time, an initial reading of v. 33 suggests that Yhwh's claim to royal authority is overblown since nowhere have the elders or people explicitly proclaimed loyalty to another king. Further, as the evocative exodus motif takes centre stage in vv. 34ff, the royal statement seems little more than a remarkable expression of Yhwh's dominance. Thus, Zimmerli labels Yhwh's intent to rule a 'majestic interpretative preface' to the more expansive and expected statements regarding a new exodus.³²

Yet, as already seen in the study of Ezekiel 8-11, Yhwh views other deities as competitors because they threaten his position as the sole authority over his people. Service rendered to wood and stone or to detestable things

³¹ Block, *Ezekiel*, 1.650.

³² Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 1.415.

and dung gods evidences diverted loyalty and thus is treasonous.

Consequently, in v. 32 the request 'to serve wood and stone' is a petition to be released from the binding covenant that Yhwh established with an earlier generation while they languished in Egypt.³³ The preceding clause 'Let us be like the nations' itself borders on treason, for it reveals a disloyalty towards Yhwh that has underlain the people's repeated dabbling with 'detestable things' and 'idols'.³⁴ The people want an authority other than Yhwh, but Yhwh fails even to dialogue about the possibility, swearing that he will subdue his people and rule over them. In other words, from Yhwh's perspective, nothing will prevent him from exercising rightful authority over his people.

Yhwh's royal response is all the more fitting in light of the purpose for which the people purportedly want to mimic their neighbours: 'to serve wood and stone'. Here the verb שָׁרַת ('to minister/serve') deepens the political hue of the people's request and, in turn, of Yhwh's response. Three times in Deuteronomy (4:28, 28:36, 64), Yhwh threatens rebellious Israel with dispersion to a land where they will 'serve wood and stone'. In each case,

³³ Cf. Jer 2:26-28 where the petition appears to have been granted. Exploring the ancient connotations of these materials as deities, E.C. LaRocca-Pitts, *Of Wood and Stone: The Significance of Israelite Cultic Items in the Bible and Its Early Interpreters* (HSM 61; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001).

³⁴ The similar expression and context in 1 Sam 8:20, 'Let us be like the nations' (וְהָיִינוּ גַם-כַּמְּלֹכֹתָם) tantalizes many scholars with the possibility that Ezek 20:32 corresponds to the monarchic desire of pre-monarchic Israel. Ohnesorge, for example, has compiled five similarities, leading him to conclude that 'a coherence between 1 Sam 8 and Ez 20,32-38 [sic.] must be assumed', *Jahweh gestaltet*, 155. His idea of a common Deuteronomic editor/author is intriguing but requires far more space for evaluation than either the present context or Ohnesorge himself may supply.

Yhwh employs the verb עבד ('to work/serve'). In Ezek 20:32, the deviation from this pattern suggests that the people's expression deliberately communicates an alternate sense of service. While עבד connotes slavery and forced labour, שרת refers to a willing expression of devotion.³⁵

With שרת Yhwh characterizes the people's desire to mimic the nations as an overt attempt to shirk their association with him. According to Yhwh, the people intend to devote themselves willingly to inert lumps. They have rejected Yhwh and consciously plan to transfer their allegiance to wood and stone. Strikingly, in his own plans for the people, Yhwh states 'all the house of Israel shall serve (עבד) me' (v. 40). Whereas the people desire to devote themselves to Yhwh's rivals, Yhwh himself will conscript the people, effectively enslaving them in his holy realm, a future that is heavily ironic in light of the pervasive exodus imagery.

3. The promise

With this sketch of the literary context, analysis of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel 20 now turns to the royal pronouncement itself. In light of Israel's history, Yhwh's claim to kingship is a suitable response to the rebellion that has marked his people since he first constituted them a political entity. Although exercised by Yhwh, this royal power appears to be engaged in the regulation and legitimation of public authority, suggesting further that the book of Ezekiel portrays Yhwh's kingship as more than a 'shorthand expression summing up the assurance of the prophetic faith'.³⁶

³⁵ Exhaustively, Sedlmeier, *Studien*, 322-340. More briefly, Ohnesorge, *Jahwe gestaltet*, 156.

³⁶ Pace W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (trans. J.A. Baker; OTL; London: SCM, 1961), 199.

3.1 The verb מִלַּךְ

As noted above, the impetus for studying Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel 20 is the deity's statement, 'I will reign as king over you' (v. 33). Of course, one of the twentieth century's thorniest questions in Hebrew Bible studies revolved around the semantics of the key verb in this sentence, מִלַּךְ, and its relation to the hypothesis of Yhwh's annual enthronement. Though important, rehearsing the extensive debate is unnecessary at present,³⁷ given M. Seybold's confidence in a cautious consensus that allows active ('reign as king'), stative ('be king') and partial ('become king') aspects.³⁸

In spite of controversy, then, מִלַּךְ in Ezek 20:33 allows for a tentative gloss as an active verb: 'I will reign as king'. In Ezekiel 1, Yhwh is the universal king, transcendent and incomprehensible, and in Ezekiel 8-II, he is king with specific reference to his errant people, in spite of their refusal to recognize his rule. Thus, the assertion here likely does not state Yhwh's intention to become king.³⁹ Admittedly, the verb communicates an action yet unfinished, indicating that, in spite of earlier confidences to the contrary, Yhwh still anticipates a future event in which he shall demonstrate his royalty. Yet this

³⁷ Of the voluminous literature, see Gray (*Reign of God*, 7-38) for arguments in favour of Mowinckel's position and H.-J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel: A Cultic History of the Old Testament* (trans. G. Buswell; Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1966), 203-205 for arguments against.

³⁸ M. Seybold, 'מִלַּךְ—*mlk*', *TDOT*, 8.370.

³⁹ D. Baltzer, *Ezechiel und Deuterjesaja: Berührungeng in der Heilserwartung der beiden großen Exilspropheten* (BZAW 121; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971), 6. However, Baltzer claims too much in stating that the political connotations have been transposed into theological aspects of kingship.

hardly requires reading מלך as denoting a process or as contradicting the earlier statements of Yhwh's rule.

The rub, of course, is that Yhwh delays the exercise of his kingship until the unstated time at which he will unite his people, a cunning anticipation of the use of מלך that designates the Davidic ruler who will facilitate a national unity (37:24). In Ezekiel 20, Yhwh is particularly concerned to work out the consequences of his universal kingship within the confines of his unique relationship with a united Israel.⁴⁰ The graded scale of utterances developed in Chapter 2 easily supports this variance by allowing that 'Yhwh is king' may have different connotations in Ezekiel 1-5 and Ezekiel 20.

3.2 Certain kingship

Yhwh's royal pronouncement announces his aim to exercise kingship over all Israel. Yet, Yhwh states far more than a bare intention to rule. Six components precede the declaration of kingship, and the first three communicate its certainty.

1) The oath, 'by my life' (חַי־אֲנִי), introduces the pronouncement. As elsewhere, Yhwh offers himself as surety for the promised action and thus guarantees it.⁴¹ Here, though, he also builds on the two earlier oaths of

⁴⁰ This specificity permeates the entirety of Ezekiel 20, through the history lesson and even in the introduction that explicitly frames the chapter as an encounter between Yhwh and the 'elders of Israel'.

⁴¹ Yhwh uses this formula sixteen times in Ezekiel, e.g., 5:11, 14:16 and 33:27. A recent exploration of oath formulae in the HB confirms that Yhwh's oath communicates the certainty of the action to hand, Y. Ziegler, *Promises to Keep: The Oath in Biblical Narrative* (VTSup 120; Leiden: Brill, 2008). The older treatment of M. Greenberg also supports this conclusion, 'The Hebrew Oath Particle Hay/He', *JBL* 76 (1957), 34-39.

Ezekiel 20 that undergirded his rejection of the elders' inquiry (vv. 3, 31).⁴² The oath in v. 33 thus occurs in strong contrast to the elders' desired divination, and, in swearing by himself, Yhwh insists that he, not the elders, is the power-broker who directs events.⁴³

2) Although a standard feature of Yhwh's oaths, the oracle formula 'utterance of lord Yhwh' (נאם אדני יהוה) is also rhetorically significant.⁴⁴ By separating the oath from the promised action (here, 'I will reign as king over you'), the formula creates a cognitive pause after the oath that focuses attention on the oath itself and consequently solemnizes Yhwh's royal pronouncement.⁴⁵

3) Six of Yhwh's oaths in Ezekiel employ the syntagm אִם-לֹא ('surely').⁴⁶ As in prohibitions and imprecations, אִם-לֹא in an oath intensifies the utterance.⁴⁷ Here, then, the phrase amplifies the seriousness of Yhwh's

⁴² Seven times in recounting Israel's history, Yhwh employs another oath formulation, stating 'I lifted up my hand' (e.g. v. 5). Though semantically overlapping, the phrase 'by my life' connotes a different sense of intensity and urgency by more intimately linking Yhwh to the subject of the oath. The triple use of 'by my life' is thus distinct from the other formulae. Cf. D. Seely, 'The Raised Hand of God as an Oath Gesture', in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. A.B. Beck et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 411-421.

⁴³ Cf. Y. Ziegler, "'As the Lord Lives and as Your Soul Lives": An Oath of Conscious Deference', *VT* 58 (2008): 118.

⁴⁴ The divine oath 'by my life' only lacks the oracle formula in Num 14:21, Deut 32:40, Ezek 17:19 and 33:27.

⁴⁵ Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, I.114.

⁴⁶ Ezek 5:11, 17:16, 17:19, 33:27, 34:8, 35:6. Also Num 14:28. Jer 22:24 has the similar כִּי אִם.

⁴⁷ Joüon-Muraoka, §165.

intention to be king.⁴⁸ So, in sum, the first three components of the royal pronouncement in Ezek 20:33 underscore the certainty of Yhwh's royal ambitions. Nothing will dissuade or deter him from being king.

3.3 Robust kingship

The final three components preceding Yhwh's royal claim are prepositional phrases that describe the nature of this kingship: with a mighty hand (בִּיד חֲזָקָה), and with an outstretched arm (וּבְזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה), and with wrath outpoured (וּבַחֲמָה שֶׁפֹּכָה). In Deuteronomy, the first two generally refer to Yhwh's deliverance of Israel from Egypt,⁴⁹ and the preponderance of study on these phrases in Ezekiel has explored their function within Yhwh's promise of a second exodus (vv. 34ff).⁵⁰ Beyond argument, Yhwh creates a richly-textured picture of a new exodus event by drawing on the Egypt exodus.⁵¹ Yet this

⁴⁸ Another five oaths in Ezekiel feature the particle אִם prefixed to the verb carrying the action that Yhwh rejects, 16:48, 18:3, 20:3, 20:31, 33:11. Here the particle functions as mediated form of לֹא אִם. Compare Jer 8:22 where אִם indicates an intensification between the first two lines of the tricolon: הֲעֵרִי אֵין בְּגִלְעָד ('Is there no balm in Gilead?'), אִם-רֹפֵא אֵין שָׁם ('is there no healer there?!').

⁴⁹ Deut 4:34, 5:15, 7:19, 11:2, 26:8. The relationship between Deuteronomy and other locations of the phrases is unimportant to settle at present. It is enough for now simply to note also Jer 32:21 (with אֲזִירֶנּוּ) and Ps 136:12 that resemble the Deuteronomic usage. See below for 1 Kgs 8:42//2 Chr 6:32 for the two phrases used without mention of the Exodus event.

⁵⁰ E.g., the brisk study of R. Levitt-Kohn, "'With A Mighty Hand and An Outstretched Arm': The Prophet and the Torah in Ezekiel 20", in *EHW*, 159-168. Though older, W. Zimmerli's treatment of the theme remains the standard, 'Der "neue Exodus" in der Verkündigung der beiden großen Exilspropheten', in *Gottes Offenbarung: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (ThB 19; Munich: Kaiser, 1963), 192-204.

⁵¹ Beyond conceptual overlaps, lexical similarities also suggest a second exodus here. Among many examples, the recognition formula (v. 42) precedes Yhwh's guarantee to 'bring you to the land (אֶרֶץ) of Israel, to the territory (אֶרֶץ) that I swore to give to their fathers'. This statement nearly replicates Exo 6:8, 'I will bring you to the territory (אֶרֶץ) that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. In Ezek 20:42, the use of נָשָׂא אֶת-יָדִי for Yhwh's oath is a notable divergence from

new exodus contrasts on several points with the Egypt exodus, not least in the judgment that Yhwh will exact upon his people as he guides them to the new promised land.⁵² Although assuring deliverance from bondage, Yhwh promises a painful process oriented less to the people's benefit than to the display of his own power.

Even a glance at non-Ezekielian accounts of the first exodus registers the uniqueness of Ezekiel's second exodus. In the book of Exodus, Yhwh initiates deliverance for his people when he hears their sighs and cries induced by the suffering of slavery (2:23-25). He then accomplishes their release in order to grant them both relief (3:5) and a home in the promised land (3:8).⁵³ According to Ezekiel 20, however, the second exodus will be devoid of compassion. Rather than granting relief from suffering, Yhwh will extract his people in order to display his credentials as a mighty king. Ezekiel 20 spotlights the people's subservience to Yhwh as mandatory and enforced, rather than as a by-product of Yhwh's deliverance (Exo 3:12). Indeed, Yhwh promises a new exodus to the inquiring elders merely in order to facilitate recognition and adoration of his power.⁵⁴ So, although undoubtedly

the semantically similar *חַיִּי אֲנִי* formula that introduces his response to the elders (vv. 3, 31, 33). This variance permits Ezekiel 20 to distinguish between Yhwh's oaths to the patriarchs (*אֲתִּירָא נֶשְׁמָה*) and to the present generation (*חַיִּי אֲנִי*). J. Lust offers an entrée to this sticky debate, 'Exodus 6,2-8 and Ezekiel', in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction-Reception-Interpretation* (ed. M. Vervenne; BETL 126; Leuven: Leuven University, 1996), 218-224.

⁵² Baltzer, *Ezechiel und Deuteronesaja*, 5-11.

⁵³ Deut 26:5-9 also maintains these emphases.

⁵⁴ Baltzer puts it succinctly, 'The theme of the exodus in Ezekiel stands in the service of the reign and legal claims of Yhwh over his people', *Ezechiel und Deuteronesaja*, 7.

channelling the first exodus, Ezekiel's second exodus evidences a shift in Yhwh's priorities, suggesting that the Deuteronomic phrases merit fresh scrutiny for their suitability. Of particular interest is why Deuteronomy claimed them as apropos to the first exodus.⁵⁵

A close reading of these two phrases is all the more important in light of the occurrences that resist assimilation into the exodus tradition. For example, in dedicating the temple, Solomon prays that a foreigner from a distant country might visit because of the renown of Yhwh's 'great name, strong hand, and outstretched arm' (1 Kgs 8:42//2 Chr 6:32). The syntax of the prayer indicates that the phrases 'your strong hand and outstretched arm' function as a metonym for Yhwh's power or for his capacity to act decisively in human affairs.⁵⁶ While the exodus event certainly falls within the scope of such divine actions, this suggests that Solomon's prayer envisions more than the exodus event. Solomon has clearly mentioned the exodus from Egypt twice already; another reference, especially one so vague, seems unlikely. Further, by welding the stock phrases to 'your great name' he signals an

⁵⁵ K. Martens provides a valuable discussion of these phrases and their variants, "“With a Strong Hand and an Outstretched Arm”: The Meaning of the Expression בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבִזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה", SJOT 15 (2001): 123-141. However, as noted below, her conclusion—that the phrases refer to Yhwh's power to inflict plagues—neglects an adequate explanation of why hand/arm imagery is suitable in the first place.

⁵⁶ The English translation obscures this point by providing three objects for the verb 'they will hear'. In contrast, the MT has only two 'your great name' (אֶת־שֵׁםְךָ הַגָּדוֹל) and the stock phrases under consideration here (וְאֶת־יָדְךָ הַחֲזָקָה וְזְרוֹעְךָ הַנְטוּיָה), Cf. M.J. Mulder, 1 Kings (trans. J. Vriend; HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 436. The phenomenon does not occur in 2 the parallel of 2 Chr 6:32 since the Chronicler conflated 1 Kgs 8:41-42 into one verse.

interest in Yhwh's abstract qualities rather than his concrete actions.⁵⁷ In short, then, both context and syntax militate against even an oblique reference to the exodus event.

Jer 21:5 is similar in its absence of the exodus-event. Here the adjectives are inverted so that Yhwh will engage Zedekiah with 'outstretched hand and mighty arm' as well as with 'anger, wrath (חמה), and fury (קצף)', reminiscent of Ezek 20:33. But, for whatever reason this inversion occurs, the phrases enhance the decisiveness of Yhwh's promised encounter with Zedekiah.⁵⁸ Not only will he himself fight (וילחמתי אני), but he will do so with a ferocity reminiscent of the visional attack on Jerusalem in Ezekiel 9. With the 'outstretched hand and mighty arm' and other phrases, Jeremiah's Yhwh communicates that he will display the fullness of his power to Zedekiah.

Both 1 Kgs 8:42 and Jer 21:5 use the stock phrases appearing in Ezek 20:33 without reference to the Egypt exodus. In Solomon's prayer, the phrases function nominally, while, with slight variation, Yhwh uses them adverbially in Jeremiah 21. In both instances, though, the phrases express something of the intense power with which Yhwh acts. The non-exodus use of these phrases may illuminate their use in Ezekiel 20:33. Their juxtaposition with Yhwh's kingship opens the possibility that the primary value of the phrases in Ezek 20:33 is not to introduce an exodus motif but to characterize

⁵⁷ P. Buis observes that the breadth of Solomon's request for foreigners to worship Yhwh corresponds to the grandeur that the stranger must encounter in order be drawn to Jerusalem, *Le livre des Rois* (SB; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1997), 85.

⁵⁸ J. Lundbom, for example, links the inversion to judgment rather than deliverance, *Jeremiah 21-36* (AB 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004), 102.

the unsurpassed might of Yhwh's kingship. Although an exodus motif is contextually appropriate in Ezekiel 20, Yhwh's claim to royal rule predominates, suggesting that these phrases occur with a sense comparable to their occurrences in 1 Kgs 8:42 and Jer 2:15. A closer look at the phrases as they occur separately clarifies the sort of kingship that they claim for Yhwh.

3.4. A mighty hand

Expressions referring to the hand of Yhwh litter the Hebrew Bible. Like human hands,⁵⁹ Yhwh's hand(s) acts within the human realm⁶⁰ for salvation,⁶¹ creation,⁶² calamity⁶³ and other displays of power.⁶⁴ More to the point, the Hebrew Bible also refers to the 'mighty hand' of humans, and two instances of this combination offer a starting point for unpacking Yhwh's mighty hand.

In Num 20:20, 'with a great army and a mighty hand', the king of Edom prevents the wandering Israelites from entering Edom. Strikingly, no battle occurs. Instead, Israel turns back from the Edomite border because the Edomite army was so powerful that Israel could not even risk a skirmish. Since the phrase 'with a great army' adequately reports that Edom outnumbered Israel, the phrase 'a mighty hand' likely transmits additional

⁵⁹ E.g., for salvation, Judg 7:2, 8:22; for creation, Gen 5:29, Deut 14:29; for calamity, Judg 3:30, 1 Sam 10:18.

⁶⁰ A classic statement of this general sense is Pro 21:1, 'The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of Yhwh; as he desires, so he turns it.' Also, Psa 31:16, 92:5, 111:7, 143:6.

⁶¹ E.g., Exo 15:17, Psa 10:12, 14, 17:14, 31:6, 95:7, 104:28, 119:173, 144:7, 145:16, Job 5:18.

⁶² E.g., Psa 8:7, 19:2, 28:4, 95:5, 109:27, 119:73, 138:7, Job 10:8, 34:19.

⁶³ E.g., Deut 2:15, 32:39, 32:41, Josh 22:31, Judg 2:15, Psa 38:3, 39:11, 74:11, Job 12:9, 27:11.

⁶⁴ E.g., Gen 49:24, Exo 16:3, Psa 44:3, 78:42, 80:17, 89:13, Job 26:13.

information about the threat that the Edomites posed to Israel. In context, the likeliest option is that Edom's army itself was too dominant.

With the poetic parallel of Job 5:15, Eliphaz urges Job to remember that Yhwh intervenes for the downtrodden when schemers oppress with 'the sword from their mouth' and 'the mighty hand'.⁶⁵ Whatever the precise relation between the two oppressive tools, they are clearly complementary, not antithetical; the sword and the hand equally wreak injustice upon the poor.⁶⁶ Like Num 20:20, Job 5:15 juxtaposes 'a mighty hand' with martial terminology, suggesting that in both cases the mighty hand represents a dominance comparable to what a conquering army displays.⁶⁷ Thus, Eliphaz means that the foes of the needy attack with sharp speech and with overpowering strength.⁶⁸ In turn, this suggests that Edom bullies Israel by threatening specifically to unleash their military force.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ In the sentence וישע מחרב מפיהם מן, I read the two words with מן as, first, the direct object and then the sword's origin. This better maintains the parallel with 'a mighty hand' than taking the words as a hendiadys—'the sword, that is, their mouth'. Pace D. W. Cotter, *A Study of Job 4-5 in the Light of Contemporary Literary Theory* (SBLDS 124; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 210. Cf. Job 5:20.

⁶⁶ Lunn helpfully notes that, broadly speaking, all parallelism joins poetic lines that 'resemble' each other either negatively or positively, *Word-order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Differentiating Pragmatics and Poetics* (PBM; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 15. This simple explanation is sufficient for grappling with the sense of 'a mighty hand' in Job 5:15.

⁶⁷ Prov 30:14 also refers to mouth-borne swords as tools for abusing the needy, but the burden of the imagery is to communicate the viciousness of the oppressors rather than the nature of the violence.

⁶⁸ Cf. Hartley, *Job*, 120, n.6.

⁶⁹ E. Bridge, 'Polite Israel and Impolite Edom: Israel's Request to Travel through Edom in Numbers 20.14-21', *JSOT* 35 (2010): 85.

For appreciating the sense of 'a mighty hand' in Ezek 20:33, these two instances allow still further that Yhwh's intent to rule over rebellious Israel 'with a mighty hand' is not merely an introduction to the exodus motif that occupies vv. 34ff. Rather, if analogous to these two uses, Yhwh's aim to rule with a mighty hand is an intention to exercise power comparable to overwhelming military force. Several references related to the exodus event confirm the legitimacy of seeing Yhwh's mighty hand as evidence of the military quality of his kingship.

3.4.1 In Exodus

In Exodus, Yhwh promises to secure freedom for the Hebrew slaves by means of 'a mighty hand' which he himself will exercise (Exo 3:19-20).⁷⁰ Within this context, Yhwh's mention of a strong hand appears consonant with other deities of the ancient world bringing pestilence and plague by 'a strong hand'.⁷¹ Equally, coupled with his self-revelation as Yhwh (Exo 3:13-16; 6:3-8), the repeated assurances that 'you/they will know that I am Yhwh' (e.g., Exo 7:17) suggest that Yhwh aims to inform all parties of his divine excellence.⁷² Yet, in this theological portrait, Yhwh's persona is decidedly

⁷⁰ In v. 19, following the LXX ἐὰν μὴ in appending the particle אֲנִי to the MT וְלֹא בִיד חֲזָקָה. Cf. W.H. Propp, *Exodus 1-18* (AB 2A; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 207 and J.L. Ska, 'Note sur la traduction de W^eLÖ' en Exode III 19b', VT 44 (1994): 60-65. Though note Cassuto's creative reading of the MT, *Exodus*, 43.

⁷¹ As Propp notes but demurs, *Exodus*, 207. As argued by Martens, 'With a Strong Hand', *passim*.

⁷² Thus, W.A. Ford concludes that throughout the plagues narrative Yhwh develops a 'theocentric focus', a specifically theological purpose to the events, *God, Pharaoh and Moses: Explaining the Lord's Actions in the Exodus Plagues Narrative* (PBM; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 214.

ambiguous, much as in Ezekiel. Although commissioning a prophet (Exo 3:10), Yhwh specifically challenges the political leader who torments his people, suggesting that 'knowledge of Yhwh' includes an awareness of Yhwh's political superiority.⁷³ Further attention to the narrative suggests that Yhwh's mighty hand is less a display of his divinity than of his political might.⁷⁴

From the outset, the narrative of Exodus warrants seeing Yhwh's actions as direct confrontations of the king of Egypt. In stereotypical narrative style, Exo 1:8 frames 'a new king over Egypt' as the antagonist, in Brevard Childs's apposite words, 'a clever despot'.⁷⁵ When Yhwh finally addresses his people's plight, the narrative again returns to the king, noting his death (Exo 2:23).⁷⁶ And, while Yhwh attributes the suffering of slavery to the Egyptian taskmasters (Exo 3:8-9), the rescue from slavery requires interaction with Pharaoh himself (Exo 3:10-11). As noted above, Yhwh indicates that Pharaoh

⁷³ The focus here is the characterization of Yhwh vis-à-vis Pharaoh. There is, of course, more to the story, particularly from the vantage of Moses and the Israelites, as noted in L.M. Eslinger, 'Freedom or Knowledge: Perspective and Purpose in the Exodus Narrative (Exodus 1-15)', *JSOT* 52 (1991): 43-60.

⁷⁴ N. Sarna's observation that the plagues may affront the Egyptian deities does not damage this reading of Yhwh's hand, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 78-80. Sarna's idea is suggestive at best, as even he recognizes, not least because from Exodus 3 onward Yhwh always engages Pharaoh and/or the Egyptians, e.g., 3:20, 9:27, 14:31. The narrative wholly ignores Egypt's gods, focussing instead on Pharaoh as Yhwh's enemy. In 12:12, judgment on the Egyptian pantheon cannot refer to the plagues narrative since a future action is in view. Cf. Propp, *Exodus*, 400.

⁷⁵ B. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1974), 15. The absence of the name thus need not imply the author's ignorance, *pace* J.P. Hyatt, *Commentary on Exodus: Based on the Revised Standard Version* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971), 58.

⁷⁶ Cassuto (*Exodus*, 28) rightly reads this notification as 'preliminary information', but it is noteworthy that the author deemed the king's death as important for the narrative.

will release the Israelites only when faced with 'a strong hand' (Exo 3:19). In this context, Yhwh highlights Pharaoh's role as a national leader, twice referring to 'the king of Egypt'. An easy inference is that Yhwh's strong hand in 3:19 is an opening salvo in a battle to demonstrate Yhwh's superiority over Egypt's king.

A further aid to understanding Yhwh's mighty hand is the double attribution of the same to Pharaoh himself: 'with a mighty hand he will send them away and with a mighty hand he will drive them from the land' (Exo 6:1).⁷⁷ Tellingly, the subsequent narrative does not show Pharaoh actively involved in expelling the Israelites, nor is he even named here. As the story shows, however, only as Yhwh himself exercises a strong hand on Pharaoh, will Pharaoh 'send away' and 'drive out' the brickfield slaves.⁷⁸ Likely, then, Yhwh claims a mighty hand for Pharaoh with heavy irony, in order to intimate that, compared to Yhwh, Pharaoh has no strong hand.⁷⁹

This use of 'strong hand', then, comports with the earlier instances. Since Pharaoh is a political leader, the Israelites are his political assets. Their removal is thus an inherently political move. As the means effecting their

⁷⁷ With MT. LXX and Syriac have 'with outstretched arm' in place of the repeated 'with a mighty hand', no doubt to alleviate the potential awkwardness of a 'parallelism with the identical significance', Cassuto, *Exodus*, 74. Cf. Hyatt, *Exodus*, 92. But, note also that here LXX anomalously translates עַתָּה ('now') with ἤδη 'already', while elsewhere taking it as the expected νῦν. This variance suggests the possibility of a more complex explanation.

⁷⁸ Ford offers insightful comparison of the ambiguity cloaking the use of verbs, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses*, 12-13.

⁷⁹ J. Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville: WJK, 1994), 76.

release, Yhwh's strong hand is loaded with military imagery and is thus political machinery. The defeat of a king, let alone the august king of Egypt, son of Re and maintainer of the cosmic order, requires extraordinary military power, and Yhwh has it, exhibited in his mighty hand.

3.4.2 In Deuteronomy

In Deut 4:34, the military connotation of Yhwh's mighty hand emerges unequivocally.⁸⁰ Here, Moses recounts that Yhwh rescued Israel from Egypt by 'battle and with a mighty hand'. In parallel with 'battle', Yhwh's hand already looks suspiciously like a tool of war. Moses goes on to conclude that Yhwh is uniquely powerful because he attempted what no other deity had, 'to go and to take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation'.⁸¹

Of course, wresting one nation from another requires open defiance of a national leader, and only as political authority is overturned may its political assets be seized. Deuteronomy's account of the exodus thus pegs Yhwh as the supreme flouter of Egypt's king. Admittedly, Deuteronomy assembles this military terminology in order to support the case for Yhwh's uniqueness as Israel's deity.⁸² Yhwh, after all, was a god and not a human king. But Deuteronomy is not squeamish about hailing Yhwh as a legitimate

⁸⁰ A full list of the occurrences plus their synonyms is available in M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 329.

⁸¹ Ford (*God, Pharaoh and Moses*, 26) notes three possible parallels to Yhwh's triumph over Egypt, that further illuminate the political nature of Yhwh's actions.

⁸² J. Tigay rightly affirms that Moses argues for the 'powerlessness of Egypt's gods and uniqueness of Yhwh as the only true god', *Deuteronomy* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: JPS, 1996), 56. But, as in Exodus, emphasizing Yhwh's actions as divine hardly eliminates the political nature of his challenge.

political figure who challenges human political authorities.⁸³ Yhwh is king, and, like any exalted king, he leads unassailable military incursions in order to secure his assets.⁸⁴ His mighty hand symbolizes this military power.

3.5 An outstretched arm

In the Hebrew Bible, the phrase ‘an outstretched arm’ primarily occurs in conjunction with the exodus event.⁸⁵ However, ‘hand’ frequently pairs with forms of the verb *נָטָה* (‘to stretch out’), and the semantic overlap between ‘hand’ and ‘arm’ suggests that the key term is the verb, not the noun.⁸⁶ Isaiah and Ezekiel employ ‘outstretched hand’ with particular force against Yhwh’s enemies.

For example, in several oracles against political entities, Isaiah states ‘and his hand is still outstretched’ to announce impending judgment. In 5:25, the context is a reflection on Israel’s rebellious history and in 9:11, 16, 20 Yhwh will send still more punishment for Israel’s persistent hubris, as guaranteed by his outstretched arm.⁸⁷ In 14:24-28, Assyria’s demise is certain because

⁸³ Cf. McConville, *God and Earthly Powers*, 19-28, noting that this dynamic permeates the Hebrew Bible.

⁸⁴ Cf. Ezekiel 38-39 as Yhwh battles Gog of Magog for the sake of his people. See Chapter 7, §2.2.

⁸⁵ The exceptions are in Solomon’s prayer and the parallel Jer 27:5 and 32:17 that attribute creation to Yhwh’s ‘outstretched arm’.

⁸⁶ Cf. C. Houtman, *Exodus*, 1.25-29.

⁸⁷ H.G.M. Williamson, commenting on 5:25, rightly recognizes that Yhwh’s outstretched hand is not necessarily a promise of military destruction, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 1-27*, vol. 1, *Isaiah 1-5* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 404. Natural phenomena could also be in view. But this does not invalidate the present argument for seeing Yhwh’s outstretched hand/arm as a specifically political move. Regardless of the ‘earthly’ means that effect judgment, these texts claim Yhwh’s hand as the force behind the collapse of political powers.

Yhwh's 'hand is outstretched' with no one to deflect it. Here, the military connotations of Yhwh's outstretched hand come to the fore, as he extends the hand over not just Assyria but 'all the nations' in order to 'break' and 'trample'. Similarly, in 23:II, the military prowess of Tyre and Sidon teeters on destruction because Yhwh 'has stretched out his hand over the sea.' Here the parallel phrase 'he has shaken kingdoms' clarifies that Yhwh's outstretched hand is a menace to the political establishments that dominate the sea—Tyre and Sidon—and not to the water or its creatures. In each case, then, an outstretched hand is Yhwh's means of destroying a political power.⁸⁸

In these representative examples, the juxtaposition of 'hand' and 'stretch out' communicates a destructive display of power geared to dispatch Yhwh's enemies. The semantic overlap between 'hand' and 'arm' permits these examples to illuminate the Deuteronomic phrase, 'with an outstretched arm', that occurs in reference to the exodus event. Admittedly, in referring to Yhwh's outstretched hand, Isaiah and Ezekiel envision a calamity leading to political dissolution, whereas the Deuteronomic phrase refers to the monumental power that effected Israel's release from Egypt. But the fundamental similarity is clear: Yhwh's outstretched hand/arm is a weapon against political opponents.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Cf. Yhwh's outstretched hand in Ezekiel against Judah (6:14, 16:27) false prophets (14:9), Ammon (25:7), Edom (25:13), Philistia (25:16) and Mt. Seir (35:3).

⁸⁹ Enquiring further about the significance of the syntagm 'hand/arm + to stretch out' may further bolster this case, albeit at the cost of straining too far afield. Suggestively, J.K. Hoffmeier contends that accounts of the exodus event attribute an outstretched arm to Yhwh in order to show him as superior to Pharaoh, the expected bearer of an outstretched arm has correlated, 'The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives', *Bib* 67 (1986): 378-387.

In Ezek 20:33, Yhwh's mighty hand and outstretched arm qualify the type of kingship that Yhwh will exercise over his people. Elsewhere, both phrases occur as descriptions of power that Yhwh will display against his enemies. Most commonly, the mighty hand and outstretched arm describe Yhwh's actions related to the exodus event, but several exceptions suggest the legitimacy of reading Ezek 20:33 as more than a merely formulaic echo of the exodus. Rather, the phrases occur here as deliberate expressions of the unsurpassable political clout that Yhwh will wield against his people. They have rebelled, but he will rule them. Ezekiel describes Yhwh as a rampant warrior set to subdue his errant subjects by reigning over them as king, and thereby providing a corrective to Israel's rebellion.

3.6 With wrath outpoured

The final component preceding Yhwh's declaration of kingship in Ezek 20:33—'with wrath outpoured'—provides a further characterization of Yhwh's rule. Whereas the deity-king's mighty hand against Pharaoh sprang from Yhwh's compassion for his people, the mighty hand of Ezek 20:33 arises on account of the people's own provocations.

The image of wrath as a pourable substance is transparent enough. Like water (Exo 4:9), blood (Deut 12:16) or broth (Judg 6:20), Yhwh's wrath will be ejected from its figurative container. Or, like entrails spilling from a

Just as the Egyptians viewed Pharaoh's arm as the means of establishing his power over (political) enemies, so, according to Hoffmeier, the HB claims the same for Yhwh's arm in relation to Pharaoh. M. Weinfeld independently affirms Hoffmeier, though without development, *Deuteronomy 1-11*. (AB 5A; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 212. But, oddly, Hoffmeier ignores Weinfeld's earlier statement on the subject in *Deuteronomic School*, 329.

ruptured belly (2 Sam 20:10), Yhwh's wrath will gush upon his people.⁹⁰ Yet, of course, rather than merely moistening a surface, Yhwh's wrath will promote his rule by flooding across his people and demonstrating the character of his kingship.

In Ezekiel 'wrath' (חמה) is a common term denoting Yhwh's response to his people's behaviour. Following the treasonous abominations of the temple, Yhwh exclaimed 'I will act in wrath; my eye will not look in compassion...' (8:18), and, during the divine battle against the abominators, the prophet queries whether Yhwh will make a complete end of Judah 'in the outpouring of your wrath' (9:8). Though less lethal, Ezekiel 13 also promises Yhwh's wrath, here as a destructive force against the false prophets' mirages of hope (vv. 13, 15).⁹¹ In short, Yhwh's wrath denotes a fierce force directed against those who have contravened his rule (cf. 14:19 and 19:12). Thus, Yhwh's guarantee to rule with outpoured wrath comes as little surprise.

Even in Ezekiel 20, wrath has already featured prominently. In the history lesson, Yhwh recounted intentions to pour out wrath upon previous generations (vv. 8, 13, 21), but these earlier aims were halted by a more dominant intention to preserve his reputation (vv. 8, 14, 22). Now, though, Yhwh offers no mitigation. He will pour out his wrath because his reputation as a king demands a decisive display of royal authority. Now the exalted, unassailable king of Ezekiel 1 will draw intransigent Israel under his sway. An

⁹⁰ Each of these examples employ the verb שפך ('to pour out').

⁹¹ In Ezekiel 13, the verb paired with 'wrath' is Piel כלה ('to complete, to finish'). Its semantic range overlaps with שפך ('to pour out') in 20:33 and with Hiphil נה ('to cause to rest') in 16:42 by denoting the end of something. In this way, Yhwh's dealings with the prophets and with Jerusalem are illustrative parallels to his kingship posited in Ezekiel 20.

outpouring of wrath, rather than a mere trickle, is apropos because his people have poured out offenses through violent injustice. Physical abuse,⁹² characterized as pouring out of blood (שִׁפְךָ דָּם), and disloyalty,⁹³ characterized as pouring out of lust or whorings (שִׁפְךָ נְהֻשָּׁה / הֲזֹנוּת), will subside only when met with a greater force, the flood of wrath Yhwh will unleash. The implication is that those drenched by Yhwh's wrath will submit to his kingship.

4. Ramifications of kingship

Yhwh's kingship over rebel Israel is a certainty since Yhwh is already enthroned. He merely needs to subdue his errant people. The character of the kingship is markedly robust and oriented toward establishing himself as the chief political figure for his people. As his response to the elders continues, Yhwh embellishes the consequences of his kingship, providing a glimpse into the climax of kingship described in Ezekiel 40-48.

4.1 New exodus and holiness

The final three phrases that precede Yhwh's royal declaration recur in v. 34: 'with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath outpoured'. This repetition draws the subsequent claim—'I will bring you out from the peoples'—into close relationship with Yhwh's kingship. In spite of the dramatic *inclusio* formed by the repeated phrases, the new exodus will occur as a result of Yhwh's kingship, not in order to facilitate it.⁹⁴ Indeed, the

⁹² Ezek 18:10, 22:3-4, 22:6, 22:9, 22:12, 22:27, 23:45, 24:7, 33:25, 36:18.

⁹³ Ezek 16:15, 23:8 and 16:36.

⁹⁴ Block, *Ezekiel*, 1.650-51. Pace Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.372.

remaining actions of vv. 35-44 flow out of Yhwh's kingship, demonstrating his authority over his rebel people.

Elsewhere, the clause 'and I will bring you out from' (וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֹתְכֶם מִן) occurs only at Ezek 11:9 and Exo 6:6,⁹⁵ suggesting at least a conceptual link to the Exodus narrative.⁹⁶ In Exo 6:6, Yhwh stated to Moses, 'I am Yhwh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.' The action of release follows logically from Yhwh's self-identification.⁹⁷ And, in Ezekiel 20, a second exodus will occur as an outworking of Yhwh's kingship. Thus, *because* Yhwh is reigning over his people, he will extricate them.⁹⁸ Of course, like the retelling of Israel's history in vv. 5-26, Yhwh's promise of new exodus transforms a familiar concept. In contrast to the first exodus, Yhwh's promise to release Israel from exile will force them out of their relative ease rather than from slavery.⁹⁹ And, rather than embarking on a journey to milk and honey, they will find themselves in militant subjugation to the divine king.

⁹⁵ Though close variations are sprinkled throughout the Hebrew Bible, e.g., Exo 12:7, Lev 25:38, Josh 24:5, 1 Kgs 8:16//2 Chr 6:5.

⁹⁶ A verdict on the literary relationship of Ezekiel 20 and Exodus 6 is unnecessary to appreciate the sense of the verb here. As earlier on this topic, see Lust, 'Exodus 6,2-8 and Ezekiel', 216.

⁹⁷ Cf. Joüon-Muraoka, §119c.

⁹⁸ Cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, I.415.

⁹⁹ Although aware of the redactional concerns already addressed in §1.2 above, here I read the assumed historical setting in keeping with the received form of the MT. Thus, with 20:1 assuming a pre-exilic situation in roughly 591 BCE, the early readers of Ezekiel 20 would have encountered Ezekiel's second exodus as directed at the civil leaders and literati whom Nebuchadnezzar culled in 597 BCE. If the so-called Weidner Chronicle, depicting oil delivered to Jehoiachin, is any indication, then these captured people fared far better than the Israelite slaves in Egypt, E. Weidner, 'Jojachin, König von Juda, in Babylonischen Keilschrifttexten', in

Chapter 5—The King's Promise

Yhwh's attention to the politics of the land lodges another claim for his political supremacy (cf. Chapter 7, §4.3). Whereas the inhabitants of Jerusalem viewed the land as uniquely theirs (11:15), Yhwh demonstrates in 20:38, 40 that he alone controls the land. The central role of the land in establishing Yhwh's kingship emerges unmistakably in v. 42, 'You will know that I am Yhwh when I bring you to the territory of Israel, to the land that I swore to give to your fathers'. As sovereign over all the earth, Yhwh regulates all disbursement of territory.

Yet his people have not recognized his sovereignty, since they have cast their loyalty to the various objects described as 'dung gods' and 'worthless things'. While these inanimate gods have no capacity to disburse territory, Yhwh does, and the encounter with his people will highlight this issue precisely in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of his kingship. In observing Yhwh's control over the land, not only will the people affirm Yhwh's lordship (v. 42), but they will see the weakness of their own ways. The pretence of the past will fall away as the people encounter Yhwh 'face to face' (v. 35).

Since Yhwh governs the land, he orders its goings-on. In 20:40, 'my holy mountain' envisions the whole of geographical Israel as Yhwh's holy abode. There the people whom Yhwh permits to enter the land will signal their obeisance by pledging their loyalty to Yhwh alone. The treason that once marked them will be absent because Yhwh's people will serve him.

Mélanges Syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud (Vol. 2; Paris: P. Geuthner, 1939), 923-935. Cf. Mein, *Ethics of Exile*, 54-66.

Yhwh, not the dung gods nor those made of wood and stone, will be king over his people.

A further outworking of Yhwh's royal declaration is a deepening of his kingly identity. In reigning over his people, he will act as judge (vv. 35-36),¹⁰⁰ a role that he blends with shepherding imagery, claiming 'I will make you pass under the staff'.¹⁰¹ Here, anticipating Ezekiel 34, Yhwh's shepherding lacks the personal intimacy exhibited in the classic Psalm 23.¹⁰² The purpose is not relational tenderness but the exercise of political authority that comes as Yhwh binds the people to himself.¹⁰³ Yet, as seen vividly in the vision of Ezekiel 8-II, Yhwh wants only loyal subjects. So, like a shepherd culling his flock, Yhwh will separate rebels from the faithful (v. 38).

The stated consequence of this selection process is that 'you shall know that I am Yhwh' (v. 38), but the implicit reason is that Yhwh the shepherd will lead only holy sheep to his holy mountain (v. 40).¹⁰⁴ Here, then,

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Chapter 7, §5.1 for the legal motif in relation to Yhwh's kingship. On the specific point of Yhwh as judge, Brettler, *God is King*, 109-116.

¹⁰¹ Lev 27:32 has the shepherding technique within the cultic context, 'every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth [animal] that passes under the rod, shall be holy to Yhwh'. And while the cultic context is important to Ezekiel 20, the political is equally prominent. As seen in Chapter 6, 'shepherd' is thus an apropos designation for Yhwh at this juncture.

¹⁰² B. Tanner's rereading of Psalm 23 opens this line of thought, 'King Yahweh as the Good Shepherd: Taking Another Look at the Image of God in Psalm 23', in *David and Zion*, 267-284.

¹⁰³ This seems to be the burden of the hapax מַבְּדֵל ('bond'), S. Yona and M.I. Gruber, 'The Meaning of Masoret in Ezek. 20:37 and in Rabbinic Hebrew', *RRJ* 10 (2007): 210-220.

¹⁰⁴ The mythical elements of this mountain worship receive brief mention below and fuller treatment in Chapter 7, §5.4. For now, noting the move beyond a concrete, historical referent is

the ambiguity of Yhwh's identity returns to the fore. He will reign as king, but his reign is marked by holiness, a characteristic of the divine. He acts as shepherd and judge in order that, as god, he may be served (v. 40). And yet, as noted above, 'serving' (עבד) carries heavy political connotations, not least because the people will serve by Yhwh's fiat. Thus, in Ezekiel 20, as throughout the book, Yhwh's divine and political identities are inextricably intertwined.

4.2 Universal kingship

Ezekiel 20 reaffirms the universality of Yhwh's kingship, returning to a major theme of Ezekiel 1. Though subtle, this thematic restatement bears notice in order to highlight the continuity of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel. Just as the exodus from Egypt pitted Yhwh against a political entity, so the ingathering promised in Ezek 20:34 will require a display of power in the face of established regimes.

Greenberg is no doubt correct to see the prepositional phrases of v. 34 ('with a mighty hand', etc.) as actions against Israel, rather than 'the peoples', particularly in light of Ezekiel's fixation on Yhwh's wrath as directed at Israel.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, this does not relieve the peoples from experiencing Yhwh's wrath. After all, in facilitating Israel's deliverance, Yhwh will strip the peoples of a political asset just as he did Egypt in the first

sufficient. Among others', Krüger's ('Transformation of History', 167) attempts to date the text based on expectation of all Israel serving Yhwh may therefore ring somewhat hollow.

¹⁰⁵ Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.371-372.

exodus.¹⁰⁶ Yhwh's exercise of kingship extends beyond national Israel because he is the transcendent king, the supreme political figure.

What is more, reference to 'the peoples' rather than 'the nations' (v. 32), signals the breadth of Yhwh's reign. As elsewhere in Ezekiel, 'the peoples' is a generic epithet for a corporate whole functioning as a political entity. For example, Yhwh's interaction with 'the peoples' occurs in the context of rescuing both Israel (11:17, 28:25, 34:13, 39:27) and Egypt (29:13) from diaspora. Tyre is said to be a 'peddler' to 'the peoples' (27:3), and Yhwh judges Ammon by isolating her from both 'the peoples' (25:7) and 'the countries'. Farther afield, because Israel was unique to Yhwh 'among all the peoples' (Exo 19:5), they were to eschew the gods of 'the peoples' (e.g., Deut 6:14). In a distinctly political context, Haman advises King Ahasuerus on the legal practices of 'the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom' (Est 3:8). Several psalms invite 'the peoples' to worship Yhwh (e.g., Psa 47:2, 49:2). Yhwh will focus his kingship over Israel because he is her god, but, all other indications aside, the political nature of his kingship is undeniable because the exercise of his reign will stretch beyond national Israel to the kingdoms of the earth.

Anticipating notions explored more fully in Chapter 8, a subtle opposition to Babylonian hegemony may also be detected, since Yhwh's kingship will thwart the military might that created the circumstances of Israel's captivity. Yhwh is king like none other, greater even than

¹⁰⁶ As noted above (§3.4.2). As Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 1.415-416) observes, Yhwh seems to deal in such stereotypical language as to marginalize the importance of settling the historical referent of the peoples and the desert of judgment. The eschatological character of vv. 40-44 also suggests this.

Nebuchadnezzar. In promising to release his people from Babylon (or wherever they may be), Yhwh forges his identity as a political figure that dominates all who oppose him. The 'strong hand, outstretched arm, and outpoured wrath' that mark his kingship over Israel equally defines his engagement of the nations that hold Israel captive. Thus, although only intimated, Ezek 20:34 confirms that Yhwh's kingship extends over all nations, not just the one which he has chosen as his treasured possession. Yhwh, the king of all the earth, deserves global obeisance, and his systematic campaign to ensure the recognition of his status begins with the house of Israel.

Conclusion

Like Ezekiel 1 and 10, Ezekiel 20 contains an overt statement of Yhwh's kingship. And, as in the earlier chapters, a single word influences the whole passage, there 'throne' and here **אֲמִלֹךְ** ('I will reign as king'). While Ezekiel 20 opens as a request for divine communication and (presumably) guidance, Yhwh's royal declaration in v. 33 signals that his interaction with the elders primarily concerns the authority to which they submitted. The cultic and religious dimensions of the divine-human interchange are subsumed by the political. Yet even before v. 33, Ezekiel 20 mixes legal terminology and the language of rebellion, thereby orientating Yhwh's relationship with his people towards the exercise and validation of power. The explicit claim to kingship (v. 33) is thus a fulfilment of expectations rather than an unexpected outburst.

Six components preface Yhwh's claim to kingship, portraying him as an indefatigable, militaristic king. Having established the character and certainty of his kingship, Yhwh outlines the consequences of his kingship. In

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contrast to the generations that rebelled against him, the generation he now addresses will be holy and thereby fulfil the intended design for their forefathers. Equally, by correlating his kingship with a new exodus, Yhwh confirms the universal authority already established in Ezekiel 1. The overt expression of kingship in Ezekiel 20 thus largely harmonizes with the other overt expressions (1:26, 10:1) and enriches Ezekiel's portrayal of Yhwh as king.

Ezekiel 20 also reinforces a dimension of Yhwh's kingship addressed in Ezekiel 8-11: as king, Yhwh trumps human authorities because he is most qualified to rule the people of Israel. In Ezekiel 20, as earlier, the elders have merited Yhwh's disfavour by aligning themselves with non-Yahwistic deities. Their failure to accept Yhwh's authority also precludes the elders from a successful authority of their own. The critique of the elders goes beyond simply showing up their cultic unfaithfulness to showing their unsuitability to wield power in Yhwh's economy. The elders have neglected Yhwh's legal requirements, and, in so doing, they have enervated their ability to achieve blessing for the people. Yhwh reprimands the former and redresses the latter, anticipating the resounding critique of Israel's leaders that occupies Chapter 6 and showing himself to be a political figure, the true king of Israel.

CHAPTER 6—THE KING AND HIS RIVALS (EZEKIEL 34)

1. Introduction

Following Ezekiel 20, the next overt description of Yhwh's kingship occurs in Ezekiel 34. Here Ezekiel depicts Yhwh as a shepherd who will tend his flock with justice (v. 16) in contrast to the ruthless human shepherds. While the human shepherds prosper at the flock's expense, Yhwh will nurture his sheep so that they thrive. In the ancient world shepherding readily registered as a royal image.¹ And even today students of the ancient world recognize that 'shepherd' often expresses kingship, even if initially the idiom appears purely pastoral.² The challenge of reading Ezekiel 34 thus lies in parsing the particulars of the shepherd motif and apprehending the significance of Yhwh's role as shepherd.

After establishing the parameters of the pericope, a brief analysis of shepherding language will precede the investigation of how Yhwh himself demonstrates kingship. Following the pattern of previous chapters, this

¹ In lieu of rehearsing the well-known and massive literature noting this, a brief comment will suffice. In the ancient world, both kings and gods received the epithet 'shepherd'. For example, in the collection of laws now referred to as the Code of Hammurabi, the eponymous king takes the title 'shepherd', as does Gudea of Lagash. Cf. W.H. Hallo, *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles: A Philologic and Historical Analysis* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1957), 147-149. And, among others, the god Shamash was known as a shepherd for the people. Cf. W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), 88-89. Ancient Israel hailed Yhwh as shepherd (e.g., Gen 48:15, Psa 80:1), and, as seen below, numerous political officials, including kings received the title as well.

² So widespread is the awareness that 'shepherd' may be a royal title, even a broadly theological article recognizes the possibility without needing to substantiate the assumption, T. Clemens, 'Searching for the Good Shepherd', *NAK* 83 (2003): 17-18.

chapter will explore Yhwh's kingship, with a particular focus on the interchanges between Yhwh and the other power structures.

1.1 Pericope coherence

The case for reading the MT of Ezekiel 34 as a single pericope is relatively straightforward. Bracketed by the formula 'the word of Yhwh came to me' (34:1 and 35:1), the chapter is thematically coherent as a sustained critique of Israel's leadership. The pastoral motif pervades the chapter, beginning with Yhwh's instruction to Ezekiel ('Prophecy against the shepherds of Israel') and concluding with a reiteration that Yhwh is the shepherd of Israel.

Admittedly, v. 24 does contain the concluding formula 'I, Yhwh, have spoken', suggesting that vv. 25-31 begin a new unit.³ These verses evidence a marked difference in content. Yhwh begins by pledging to establish a covenant of peace that will bring blessings similar to those laid out in Leviticus 26.⁴ The pastoral language of sheep, shepherds, pastures and pasturing is absent until the coda of v. 31. And this vocabulary gap influences the opinion that the vv. 25-30 have abandoned the pastoral motif.⁵ But brief attention to these verses shows that vv. 25-30 develop, rather than discard, the theme of shepherding. For example, Yhwh's covenant of peace will prevent the sheep from becoming 'prey' to 'wild beasts', thereby rectifying the earlier problem

³ Cf. the structure provided by Hals, *Ezekiel*, 248.

⁴ As many have noted. J. Milgrom offers a concise presentation of parallels, 'Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel', in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders* (ed. C.A. Evans and S. Talmon; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 57-62. Cf. Lyons, *Law to Prophecy*, 178-186.

⁵ E.g., Pohlmann, *Hesekiel/Ezekiel*, 2.461.

of the sheep falling ‘prey’ to ‘wild beasts’ on account of the shepherds’ negligence (v. 8). Equally, the sheep will dwell ‘securely’ in the ‘woods’ and ‘wilderness’, hardly the abodes of humans. And Yhwh will ensure that ‘no one causes fear’, a principle concern for the care of skittish sheep. Yhwh’s shepherding skill redresses the wrongs of Israel’s earlier shepherds. Zimmerli’s assessment that ‘the main theme of Ezekiel 34 has disappeared completely’ in these verses thus seems overstated.⁶

The present interest in Ezekiel 34 lies beyond a quest for its historical production.⁷ Yet even if vv. 25-31 derive from a different non-textual setting than vv. 1-24, editorial proficiency has successfully blended the two subunits into a single work of literary coherence. The central concern is to depict Yhwh as a political power in opposition to Israel’s corrupt leadership.

1.2 Shepherds and kings

Understanding the dynamics of Yhwh’s kingship in Ezekiel 34 depends on identifying his opponents. Trawling the literature on Ezekiel 34 shows consensus that the shepherds whom Yhwh challenges are the leaders of Israel. But naming these leaders, either as a class or as individuals, raises four rough categories of opinion. 1) Pohlmann sees post-587 BCE leaders, reasoning that Yhwh’s threat against the shepherds would be null if directed against the non-ruling leaders of pre-fall Judah. The editorial placement of Ezekiel 34

⁶ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.221.

⁷ The most thorough investigation of textual strata in Ezekiel 34 is B. Willmes, *Die sogenannte Hirtenallegorie EZ 34. Studien zum Bild des Hirten im Alten Testament* (BBET 19; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984).

after the announcement of Jerusalem's fall (33:21) may support this position.⁸

2) Zimmerli rejects the impulse to specify which leaders Yhwh addresses, claiming instead that Yhwh engages all past and present leaders of Israel.⁹ 3) Greenberg sees the shepherds of v. 2 as 'the political leaders responsible for the disaster that befell Israel...Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, along with their advisors and officials'.¹⁰ 4) And Allen, perhaps speaking for the majority, identifies the shepherds simply as the kings of Judah.¹¹ Each option has merit, but none adequately makes sense of the data.

Pohlmann's position assumes that the fall of Jerusalem narrated in 33:21 is a literary watershed that requires Ezekiel 34-48 to address only post-587 matters. But this is unwarranted. Ezek 43:7-9 mentions pre-587 sins, as does 44:6-14. Further, ample prophetic material in the Hebrew Bible addresses people who never audibly hear the words of Yhwh's prophet, for example, oracles about foreign nations. Though attractive, the specificity of Greenberg's option treads too narrow a line and supposes that only the era of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah bears responsibility for Judah's fall. Further, Ezekiel consistently employs 'Israel' to designate the whole of Yhwh's people, not just Judah.¹² And yet, *pace* Zimmerli, even if a majority are culpable, not all

⁸ Pohlmann, *Hesekiel/Ezekiel*, 2.463-64.

⁹ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.214.

¹⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 2.694-95. Cf. Mein, *Ethics of Exile*, 96-97.

¹¹ Allen, *Ezekiel*, 2.161. Cf. W. Lemke, 'Life in the Present and Hope for the Future', *Int* 38 (1984): 173.

¹² W. Zimmerli, 'Israel im Buche Ezechiel', *VT* 8 (1958): 75-90.

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Israel's kings are in view. David, for one, cannot be since Yhwh promises to reinstate him. Seeing the shepherds as only kings too narrowly restricts Yhwh's critique and diverges from his concern elsewhere in Ezekiel to challenge other classes of rulers. Finally, 'shepherd' is not a univocal term in the Hebrew Bible.

Not all shepherds qua leaders in the Hebrew Bible are royal figures. For example, Nah 3:18 addresses court officials: 'Your shepherds are asleep, King of Assyria. Your nobles are dormant'.¹³ The book of Jeremiah has numerous references to shepherds, and since Ezekiel 34 closely parallels Jer 23:1-8, identifying these shepherds may illuminate those in Ezekiel.¹⁴ In Jeremiah 23, Yhwh's antidote to derelict shepherds is the promise of caring shepherds (v. 4) who will assume responsibility after Yhwh himself has gathered his flock (v. 3). The future king—'a righteous Branch'—who will save Judah (vv. 5-6) is presumably one of these shepherds.¹⁵ But not all shepherds in Jeremiah are kings, and perhaps even the bad shepherds (23:1-2)

¹³ D.L. Christensen, *Nahum* (AB 24F; New Haven: Yale University, 2009), 287.

¹⁴ Virtual consensus is that Ezekiel 34 develops Jeremiah 23, e.g., W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 1:556 and Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:275-277. An exception is S. Mowinckel who reverses the direction of dependence, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania [Oslo]: Dybwad, 1914), 50.

¹⁵ Textual development in 23:1-8 creates an intuitive link between the Branch-king and the shepherds. But, reading with the grain of the MT, the good shepherds (v. 4) are unlikely to be all kings if the Branch-king is an idealized figure inaugurating a utopian age. M.A. Sweeney, 'Jeremiah's Reflection on the Isaian Royal Promise: Jeremiah 23:1-8 in Context', in *Uprooting and Planting: Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen* (ed. J. Goldingay; LHBOTS 459; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 311-315. Cf. McKane, 560-565.

who necessitate the Branch comprise both royal and non-royal leadership.¹⁶ Broadly speaking, for Jeremiah, shepherds (plural) are generic political rulers while a shepherd (singular) is specifically a royal figure. Thus, in an early oracle against his wayward people, Yhwh catalogues four classes of leaders whom he will judge, including the shepherds (2:8).¹⁷ And, as retribution for Judah's errant ways, Yhwh will send attacking shepherds with attacking flocks (6:3) who will, no doubt, encounter the 'shepherds...and lords of the flock' (25:34-36).

In contrast, the singular 'shepherd' rings with clearer royal tones. Twice Yhwh questions, 'What shepherd will stand before me?' (49:19, 50:44). The shepherd as king emerges more in the second instance of this question than in the first because the preceding verses mention 'many kings' coming against 'the king of Babylon' (50:41, 43). Further, 50:45 presents Yhwh as a lion attacking the flock that represents Babylon.¹⁸ The triplet in 51:23 also suggests the shepherd is king: 'shepherd and his flock...the farmer and his team...governors and prefects'. The variation of the triplet in the previous verse—'man and woman...old and young...boy and girl'—suggests that each pairing here in 51:23 has a different referent. So, the singular 'shepherd' is

¹⁶ So, W.L. Holladay, *Jeremiah* (2 vols.; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 1615 and R.P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1986), 444. Though, McKane sees only kings, *Jeremiah*, 1.553.

¹⁷ As shepherds of the generation that first inherited the land, these rulers are non-royal figures. Cf. Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 1.89.

¹⁸ On the 'flock' imagery in Jeremiah, D.J. Reimer, *The Oracles Against Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51: A Horror Among the Nations* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University, 1993), 197-202.

likely royal, particularly since the final doublet refers to two ranks of political officials.¹⁹

Micah 5:1-5 (ET 5:2-6) also distinguishes classes of shepherds. In response to impending battle, Micah announces a ‘ruler’ (מֶלֶךְ) who will ‘shepherd in the strength of Yhwh’ (v. 3), inaugurating an era of universal peace. He also states, ‘we will raise up over us seven shepherds and eight princes’ (v. 4).²⁰ The single shepherd dominates the text, overcoming the powers arrayed against struggling Judah. In contrast, the seven shepherds feature only briefly and only in association with the single shepherd. Seeing the shepherd-ruler as a royal figure finds initial support in his superior power, as a glance through Mic 4:6-14 (ET 4:6-5:1) suggests. Royal expectation floods this passage as Yhwh himself pledges to reign in Zion (v. 7). But Yhwh’s rule apparently does not preclude another ruler; the shepherd of 5:1 (ET 5:2) arrives to fill the void created when Yhwh dispatched the ‘judge of Israel’ (v. 14 ET 5:1). Though Yhwh may wield executive power, the dynamics of this power permit a transfer to a human agent. Indeed, Yhwh will reign through the shepherd, hence the bicolon, ‘He will shepherd in the strength of

¹⁹ The last pairing represents Akkadian terms for non-royal government officials, Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 2.424.

²⁰ The seven shepherds elude easy identification. But the structure and theme of vv. 4-5 suggest that B. Waltke is correct to link these shepherds with the one shepherd, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 294-95. Cf. D.N. Freedman and F.I. Anderson, *Micah* (AB 24E; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 480. In contrast, R.L. Smith sees the shepherds as alternate rulers, perhaps Israel’s choice opposed to Yhwh’s, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984), 45.

Yhwh, in the majesty of the name of Yhwh his god'.²¹ By Micah's calculation the single shepherd, linked to royal Yhwh, is himself a royal shepherd.²²

A brief cast to wider swathes of the Hebrew Bible confirms that Yhwh addresses both royal and non-royal leaders of Israel in Ezekiel 34. In the singular, Yhwh calls Cyrus of Persia 'my shepherd' (Isa 44:28), and Israel displays loyalty at David's kingly anointing by hailing him as shepherd (2 Sam 5:2//1 Chr 11:2).²³ In the plural, 'shepherd' appears when Yhwh refers to the 'judges of Israel whom I commanded to shepherd my people' (1 Chr 17:6).²⁴ In these examples, plural and singular appear semantically distinct.²⁵

Recognizing the ambiguity of 'shepherd' opens windows into Ezekiel 34. Since the plural 'shepherds' is frequently a non-royal designation, Yhwh's address to 'the shepherds of Israel' seems directed to non-royal leaders, as Pohlmann argues. However, as discussed fully below, the shepherds' failures induce Yhwh himself to be shepherd, a task for which he endows a Davidic

²¹ H. W. Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary* (trans. G. Stansell; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 118.

²² The absence of the root מלך ('to be king') in reference to the shepherd likely only indicates the hierarchy maintaining Yhwh's supremacy. Cf. Waltke (*Micah*, 265), who observes that 'Micah reserves to I AM the title of king', as in 2:13 and 4:9.

²³ Cf. J.J. Glück, 'Nagid-Shepherd', VT 13 (1963): 149. Cf. Psalms 78:70-72.

²⁴ LXX reads 'tribes' (שבטים) instead of 'judges' (שופטים), no doubt to harmonize with 2 Sam 7:7 that also has 'tribes'. But 'judges' makes far better sense and the single-letter difference between the two is explainable as a scribal mistake. Cf. H.G.M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 135.

²⁵ Further exploration of this theme would consider Isa 56:11 where the 'watchmen' of the city are 'shepherds who do not know understanding' and especially Zechariah 10-11, on which, M.J. Boda, 'Reading between the Lines: Zechariah 11:4-16 in its Literary Contexts', in *Bringing Out the Treasure: Inner Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9-14* (ed. M.J. Boda and M.H. Floyd; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 277-291.

figure to undertake with him. As seen above, a single shepherd is likely a royal leader. This suggests that the shepherds of Israel in Ezekiel 34 are not exclusively royal, else Yhwh would here demote himself from the royal status already overtly claimed in Ezekiel 1, 8-11 and 20. On balance, then, Ezekiel 34 inhabits the ambiguity of the word ‘shepherd’, and an embrace of this ambiguity opens horizons for understanding Yhwh’s kingship.

2. The shepherds of Israel

In identifying himself as a shepherd, Yhwh once again hints at a political relationship with Israel, particularly because the image of shepherd evokes the royal benevolence from king to subjects. The clearest route to appreciating how Ezekiel 34 constructs Yhwh’s kingship lies in the marked contrast between Yhwh and Israel’s worthless shepherds. For only in grasping the utter failure of Israel’s leaders, does the significance of Yhwh’s radical solution fully emerge.

2.1 Their failures

Ezekiel 34 describes Israel’s human leaders in thoroughly negative terms. The densest description of their shortcomings occurs in vv. 2-4. In v. 2, Yhwh characterizes the ‘shepherds of Israel’ as those who ‘feed themselves’ rather than the sheep. As v. 3 specifies, however, the shepherds’ offense is not in starving the sheep but in feeding themselves on the sheep. At first glance, however, the shepherds’ offense hardly seems worthy of castigation. After all, the shepherds have merely followed custom since an ancient shepherd’s

prerogative was to collect milk²⁶ and wool and to sacrifice the fat sheep to his god or even to claim them himself.²⁷

Nevertheless, Yhwh balks at this ordinary pastoral practice, stripping the shepherds' privileges entirely. The unexpectedness and finality of Yhwh's fiat has stirred many scholars to infer a justification.²⁸ But, Andrew Mein has demonstrated that, at the outset of Ezekiel 34, Yhwh's relationship with the shepherds is not that of first among equals but of employer to employee.²⁹ In vv. 2-4, Ezekiel 34 depicts Yhwh as the owner of the sheep, not their shepherd, a characterization that is suggestive in light of Ezekiel's later description of Yhwh as the sole shepherd.³⁰ In examining their performance, Yhwh has found his shepherds wanting, and, as their superior, he owes no explanation.³¹ In this respect, the cryptic denial of the shepherds' due permits

²⁶ Following LXX, repointing MT פֶּתֶן ('fat') to חֶמֶן ('milk') in order create a series of distinct actions in ascending severity to the sheep. Among many, cf. Allen, *Ezekiel*, 2.156.

²⁷ G. Fohrer with K. Gallig, *Ezechiel* (HAT 13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1955), 192. A. Mein grounds this opinion in Mesopotamian shepherding practices, 'Profitable and Unprofitable Shepherds: Economic and Theological Perspectives on Ezekiel 34', *JSOT* 31 (2007): 499.

²⁸ E.g., Block, arguing that Yhwh characterizes the shepherd's actions as malevolent, *Ezekiel* 25-48, 283 and Zimmerli who sees only the slaughter as unacceptable, *Ezekiel* 2, 215.

²⁹ Mein, 'Profitable and Unprofitable', 496-498. Mein's proposal more plausibly accounts for Yhwh's excoriation of the shepherds than Block's (*Ezekiel*, 2.284) notion that Yhwh adopts shepherding language in keeping with contemporary deities such as Šamaš or Marduk.

³⁰ Neo-Babylonian accounting records show that the owner of sheep regularly inspected his flocks in order to ensure the propriety of the shepherds, e.g., G. van Driel and K.R. Nemet-Nejat, 'Bookkeeping Practices for an Institutional Herd at Eanna', *JCS* 46 (1994): 47-58.

³¹ In v. 8 Yhwh even refers to 'my shepherds'. Allen assumes the unusual suffix arose from editing of MT in light of its absence in LXX and Syriac, *Ezekiel*, 2.157. But Block allows that the

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Yhwh, even from the opening of his critique, to prove his dominance over the shepherds. As Ezekiel 34 develops and Yhwh himself becomes the shepherd of the sheep, this initial depiction of Yhwh as the owner of the sheep solders a subtle literary suture to the warrior-king of Ezekiel 1. Yhwh the sheep owner is the cosmic king who outranks all human authorities. Thus he owes no explanation .

Still, Yhwh details the shepherds' failures, legitimizing his case against them. As Walter Brueggemann pithily summarizes, the shepherds were 'preoccupied with [their] own majesty, prosperity and security'.³² Yhwh fires five accusations against the shepherds, upbraiding them for neglecting their most basic duty: care for the sheep.

the wounded you have not strengthened,	את־הנחלות לא חזקתם
the sick you have not healed,	ואת־החולה לא־רפאתם
the broken you have not bound up,	ולנשברת לא חבשתם
the strays you have not brought back,	ואת־הנרחת לא השבתם
the lost you have not sought	ואת־האבדת לא בקשתם

Notably, Yhwh inverts the normal verb+object construction so that each statement mentions the neglected sheep prior to stating the shepherds' shortcoming. This unexpected syntax implies the poignancy of Yhwh's own care for his sheep, for while the shepherds of Israel neglected the sheep, Yhwh prioritizes the people even while rebuking their leaders. With subtle strokes, Ezekiel portrays Yhwh as a superior shepherd.

versions may have dropped to the suffix to conform to earlier instances, *Ezekiel*, 2.279. If the shepherds are hired hands of Yhwh the sheep owner, this dispute finds resolution.

³² W. Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1993). 73.

In this way, Yhwh's address to the leaders is a double-edged critique. Since the leaders failed to care for the people, Yhwh chides them for their error. In itself, this suggests Yhwh's superiority as, reminiscent of the elders' aborted attempts at divination (Ezekiel 14, 20), Yhwh again subjects the leaders to his own agenda. He, not the leaders, is the stronger party. And, with this tack, Ezekiel draws tight the thematic cord that opened the book: Yhwh's transcendent authority. The other side of Yhwh's critique is that he has noticed the sorry condition of the sheep. He, not the elders, has recognized the wounded and sick, the broken, the strays and the lost. Later in the chapter, Yhwh's awareness of these needy sheep goes beyond recognition, as he pledges to do precisely what the shepherds of Israel failed to do. Even here, though, without redressing the wrongs, Yhwh's interest in the plight of the people demonstrates that he succeeds where Israel's leaders founder.³³

2.2 Cementing the problem

Yhwh's double-edged critique operates with rhetorical finesse. After undercutting the leaders by noting their failures, he seals their culpability by addressing what they have done, namely, 'ruled them [the sheep] with force

³³ Scholars typically emphasize Yhwh's goodwill for the sheep. Mein ('Profitable and Unprofitable', 500-502), however, argues that Yhwh's interest is economic not compassionate, befitting an ancient Mesopotamian sheep-owner. But a shepherd's concern for his own profit does not preclude tender treatment of the sheep, particularly the infirm. Psalm 23 implies the divine-shepherd's compassion even while affirming the sheep's submission to Yhwh. As H.S. Pyper puts it, 'Shepherds, after all, do not keep sheep for the love of it, [but] shepherd and sheep are bound in a mutual bond of survival', 'The Triumph of the Lamb: Psalm 23 and Textual Fitness', *BibInt* 9 (2001): 388. Noting Yhwh's stake in the sheep's health should clarify but not downplay the contrast between Yhwh's care and the shepherd's abuse.

and ruthlessness' (v. 4).³⁴ In heaping displeasure upon his opponents, Yhwh mirrors the rhetorical attack that earlier helped to certify his superiority to the Jerusalem elite. For example, in Ezekiel 11, Yhwh exposed a blatant disregard of his statutes and rules, an offense sufficiently wicked, but then compounded the Judahites' guilt by charging them with following 'the rules' of their neighbours (v. 12). In both cases, a double condemnation emphasizes the leaders' inadequacies and disqualifies them from exercising authority.³⁵

A closer look at v. 4 uncovers the force of Yhwh's critique. As already noted (n.34) the clause *בְּחֹזֶק רִדְיָתָם אֹתָם וּבְפָרֶךְ* ('ruled them with force and ruthlessness') is syntactically unusual on account of *בְּחֹזֶק* ('with force') preceding the verb. What is more, elsewhere only Leviticus 25 links *רָדָה* ('to rule') and *בְּפָרֶךְ* ('with ruthlessness'). And Lev 25:43, 46 has the close parallel *לֹא-תִרְדֶּה בּוֹ בְּפָרֶךְ* ('you shall not rule him with ruthlessness').

Space limitations prevent adequate discussion of the relationship between Ezekiel and the Pentateuch.³⁶ But, if Leviticus is prior, the addition of *בְּחֹזֶק* may be derived from the practice of creating a doublet for rhetorical

³⁴ On three counts MT *וּבְחֹזֶק רִדְיָתָם אֹתָם וּבְפָרֶךְ* is puzzling: 1) the separated substantives, 2) the masculine pronoun in reference to feminine 'flock', and 3) the interruption of the pattern that fronts the direct object marker (see chart above). LXX compounds the confusion in lacking *וּבְחֹזֶק* and reading *בְּחֹזֶק* as a nominal adjective in conjunction with the v. 16. None of the many suggestions resolves all the difficulties of MT. Though worthy, even G.R. Driver's repointing of *אֹתָם* ('them') to *אֲתָם* ('you') fails to explain the LXX minus, 'Linguistic and Textual Problems: Ezekiel', *Bib* 19 (1938): 180-181. So, since MT is intelligible, albeit with unexpected grammar, reading MT is sufficient. Cf. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 380.

³⁵ Cf. Wevers' sentiment that v. 12 'adds nothing new, but makes explicit what is implicit', *Ezekiel*, 94.

³⁶ As noted in Chapter 5.

effect.³⁷ In compromising the law from H, the shepherds have effectively enslaved their sheep, precisely what the laws of Lev 25:35-55 forbids. If Ezekiel is prior, the brief comparison here serves to highlight that within the broader tradition, ruling with ruthlessness constituted a violation of Yhwh's law.³⁸ In both cases, ruthless rule is an affront to Yhwh himself. In Leviticus 25 this is clear from the refrain 'I am Yhwh your god' (vv. 17, 38, 55).³⁹ In Ezekiel 34 Yhwh pledges to be the shepherd who will redress the wrongs of the erstwhile shepherds. This makes Yhwh the superior leader and deepens the suspicion that his kingship is tinged, if not drenched, with political ramifications.

2.3 Consequences of failures

Yhwh needs no more than three verses (vv. 2-4) to condemn the shepherds and cement his superiority. Yet he presses the case still further. Three times in vv. 5-6, Yhwh notes the consequences of the shepherds' laxity: the dispersal of the sheep to 'all the mountains and upon every high hill and upon the face of the earth'. To tease out the pastoral imagery, this means that, due to neglect, the flock left the safety of the fold and faced predators and overexposure. Since Yhwh has already litigated for negligence, mention

³⁷ As in Ezek 22:14, 'can your heart endure or your hands be strong?' Or, as J. Milgrom suggests, it may be Ezekiel's gloss on the earlier text, *Leviticus* (3 vols. AB 3-3C; New York: Doubleday, 1991-2008), 3.2356.

³⁸ Although arguing for the priority of H, Lyons emphasizes the accusatory tone of this verse, *Law to Prophecy*, 115.

³⁹ For Leviticus 25, J.-F. Lefebvre shows a particular link to Yhwh's identity as the orchestrator of justice for Israel via exodus from slavery, *Le jubilé biblique: Lv 25—exégèse et théologie* (OBO 194; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 362-372. Regardless of literary relationship with Ezekiel 34, this evidence is highly suggestive.

of the scope of the scattering, across ‘the face of the earth’, indicates Yhwh’s opinion that the leaders of Israel are responsible for the disasters of diaspora that Judah experienced at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar’s army.

Elsewhere in Ezekiel, scattering of the people is primarily an outcome of Yhwh’s direct action against them.⁴⁰ For example, Yhwh claims, ‘I scattered them among the nations’ (11:16), likely referring to the deportation of 597 BCE.⁴¹ And, likely anticipating the 586 sack of Jerusalem he promises, ‘I will scatter you among the nations...’ (22:15).⁴² So, the scattering of the flock in Ezekiel 34 likely refers to the forced evacuations that included the 586 subduing of Jerusalem noted in 33:21. But, unlike elsewhere in Ezekiel, here Yhwh blames the scattering of his people solely on her leaders. The shift in aetiology for diaspora permits Yhwh another point of critique against Israel’s leaders, and Yhwh’s conspicuous absence as agent of diaspora positions him as the shepherd par excellence because his credentials, unlike those of Israel’s shepherds, are unsullied by greed and violence.

⁴⁰ Elsewhere the root שׁח (‘to scatter’) usually denotes a historical deportation when the object of the verb is Yhwh’s people, e.g., Jer 10:21, 23:1-4. D.J. Reimer catalogues and summarizes the diaspora language in the Hebrew Bible, ‘Exile, Diaspora, and Old Testament Theology’, *SBET* 28 (2010): 10-13.

⁴¹ The oracle of Ezek 11:15-21 assumes a date after 597 BCE since Yhwh refers to the inhabitants of Jerusalem as claiming the land in opposition to a faction that was with Ezekiel whom the book assumes is in Babylon. Cf. the promise of reversal articulated in the same terms 11:17.

⁴² E.g., Allen, *Ezekiel* 20-48, 34. Strong parallels of 22:15 occur in 12:15, also addressed to Judah, in 20:23, recounting Yhwh’s early interactions with national Israel, and in 36:19, referring to Yhwh’s action against Israel. Suggestively, Egypt receives the same treatment in 29:12-13 and 30:23, 26.

Chapter 6—The King and His Rivals

In Ezekiel, Yhwh often censures Jerusalem's political elite for disaster that befalls the people (e.g., Ezekiel 11 and 22). However, here Yhwh seems to saddle the leadership with responsibility for cultic infractions as well.⁴³ For, the shepherds' negligence scattered the sheep not just across the face of the earth but also to 'every high hill and mountain' (v. 6).⁴⁴ In Ezekiel 6 the conjunction of high places (vv. 3, 6) and 'every high hill and all the mountaintops' (v. 13) suggests that these geographical features were the site of the high places.⁴⁵ More explicitly, the veneration of non-Yahwistic deities also occurs on 'every high hill' in 20:28-29.⁴⁶ So, the subtle implication of Yhwh's charge to the shepherds is that they induced the sheep to high-place worship.⁴⁷ Elsewhere Yhwh chides the people (the flock) for their treasonous

⁴³ With greater detail and scope, Mein, *Ethics of Exile*, 101-136.

⁴⁴ At the beginning of v. 6, MT יָשְׁנוּ ('they wandered') earns near consensus as extraneous because of 1) LXX minus, 2) gender disagreement with צֹאֲנִי ('my sheep'), 3) interruption of וְהִפְצִינָה ('they were scattered'), 4) absent *waw*. Counterarguments for points 1-3 suggest the defensibility of יָשְׁנוּ, but the absence of the *waw* flags the word as a distracting gloss that detracts from the larger critique of the shepherds. Cf. Allen, *Ezekiel*, 2.157. But Joyce (*Ezekiel*, 197) registers no problem, and, ultimately, interpretation does not depend on resolution.

⁴⁵ Cf. P.H. Vaughan, *The Meaning of 'bāmā' in the Old Testament: A Study of Etymological, Textual, and Archaeological Evidence* (SOTSMS 3; Cambridge: CUP, 1974), 30.

⁴⁶ Cf. the verbatim restoration of 6:3 in 36:4 and the discussion in J. Galambush, 'This Land Is My Land: On Nature As Property in the Book of Ezekiel,' in *Every City Shall Be Forsaken: Urbanism and Prophecy in Ancient Israel and the Near East* (ed. L.L. Grabbe and R.D. Haak; JSOTSup 300; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 82.

⁴⁷ In 6:3 and 36:4, 6, the hills and mountains occur in a series of geographical features that also includes 'ravines and valleys', suggesting the totality of the land has borne the leaders' failures. Though lacking the full set of features, 34:6 likely mentions the high points as short hand for the places of idolatry, as also Deut 12:2, Jer 50:6-7, and Hos 4:13. Without reference to either hills or high places, the prophet Micaiah's phrase, 'all Israel scattered on the mountains like sheep without a shepherd' (1 Kgs 22:17), lacks a cultic reference, more explicitly noting the political

reverence of the dung-gods (e.g., 6:4, 20:39), but here he seems to blame the shepherds for permitting this worship and for instigating expulsion from Judah.⁴⁸

In addressing these cultic violations, the shepherds' identity (whether royal or non-royal) remains ambiguous. While the king may have borne covenantal responsibility for the well-being of his people, Ezekiel regularly critiques other strata of leaders for cultic failures, e.g., the elders who waved incense before engravings (8:7-13) or the priests who smudged the distinctions between holy and profane (22:26).⁴⁹ So, while a firm division between royal and non-royal leadership is still hazy, the overarching condemnation of Israel's leaders darkens on account of the consequences of their failures. Again, the implication is that Israel needs wholesale change.

2.4 The upshot

Yhwh's critique of the shepherds is not merely a deity's (or a prophet's) venting of exasperation. It is, rather, a springboard for establishing the authority of the true shepherd of Israel. Ezek 34:5 makes strides to this goal by discounting the human shepherds' political authority. Although vv. 2-4 were direct speech to the reckless shepherds of Israel, in v. 5 Yhwh states that the sheep 'were scattered because there was no shepherd'. Yhwh thus discloses his true estimation of his addressees: though they bear the title 'shepherd' on account of their offices, they have not comported themselves as

consequences of a failed leadership, M. Cogan, *I Kings* (AB 10; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 491-2.

⁴⁸ W.H. Brownlee, 'Ezekiel's Poetic Indictment of the Shepherds', *HTR* 51 (1958): 192-193.

⁴⁹ Anticipating Chapter 7, §3.3.1, the royal figure functions cultically.

shepherds, and thus they are not shepherds. Yhwh's implied logic is that a true shepherd would have prevented the sheep from being scattered or from ranging the hills where they risk death.⁵⁰ Notably, Yhwh does not skewer the shepherds for scattering the sheep but for allowing them to be scattered. The shepherds of Israel are worthless and imposters, a point made with finesse by the *nifal* (passive) rather than *qal* (active) forms of the verb פִּיץ ('to scatter').

After the initial haranguing of vv. 2-6, Yhwh turns to the burden of his tête-à-tête with the shepherds of Israel in vv. 7-9. His core concern is that they have shepherded themselves instead of the sheep. But shepherds who shepherd themselves are not fully shepherds. As seen more clearly below (§3.2), at best they are a sort of chimera, a cross between beast and man. In v. 8, more than in any verse of the chapter, Yhwh takes advantage of the pliable semantics of the Hebrew root רעה ('to pasture, tend, shepherd'), as the following translation highlights:⁵¹

...since there was no shepherd	מֵאִין רֵעָה
and my shepherds did not seek my flock	וְלֹא־דָרְשׁוּ רְעִי אֶת־צֹאֲנִי
and [since] the shepherds shepherded themselves	וַיִּרְעוּ הָרְעִים אוֹתָם
and they did not shepherd my flock...	וְאֶת־צֹאֲנִי לֹא רֵעוּ

Echoing v. 5, Yhwh explains that the sheep suffered because the shepherds were incompetent to the point of disqualifying themselves for the role of shepherd. By crystallizing his argument to this single issue, Yhwh stages a

⁵⁰ Cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.207.

⁵¹ Here רעה occurs five times; v. 10 has the root four times and vv. 2 and 14 three times each. The root רעה thus clearly permeates the whole chapter, but the ten occurrences in vv. 8-10 suggest the centrality of these verses for Yhwh's case. Cf. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 196.

compelling introduction to his own solution for the problem. Israel needs a proper shepherd.

3. The shepherd of Israel

Yet, Yhwh does not propose merely another, ordinary shepherd. The shepherds' appalling negligence created such dismal conditions for the sheep that a typical shepherd will not remedy the situation. Yhwh reveals a novel solution to the problem of Israel's leaders. Rather than rehabilitating human kingship, Yhwh himself will reign, or, to put it in the idiom of Ezekiel 34, Yhwh will be the shepherd. He states it strongly, 'I, I myself will shepherd my flock' (v. 15). In offering himself as shepherd, Yhwh initiates the only suitable response to the atrocities perpetrated by the shepherds. Human leadership has crumbled; only the divine can rebuild the ruins of the sheepfold.⁵² Only the transcendent king of Ezekiel 1 can extend his authority to recover and restore the scattered sheep.

3.1 The contrast

The contrast between divine and human shepherds is simple inasmuch as Yhwh will do what the shepherds did not. But the conviction with which Ezekiel 34 makes this contrast is complex and deserving of closer examination. The result is still further critique of Israel's leadership and burnishing of Yhwh's credentials.

The force of the contrast begins with Yhwh's reuse of verbs that earlier referred to the shepherds' actions. For example, he states 'I will require (שׂר) my sheep from your hand' (v. 10), and 'Behold, I, I myself, I will

⁵² Cf. Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 2.699. On this point in particular, Ezekiel 34 resembles Micah 4-5 where only Yhwh's kingship facilitates recovery from the rapacious human leadership and where this kingship eventually gives rise to a human shepherd.

Chapter 6—The King and His Rivals

seek (דַּרַשׁ) my sheep' (v. 11). Here Yhwh overturns the shepherds' unwillingness to seek (דַּרַשׁ) the sheep (vv. 6, 8). Similarly, Yhwh assures that he will 'seek' (בִּקֵּשׁ) the lost sheep (v. 16), whereas earlier 'there was no one seeking' (בִּקֵּשׁ) the sheep (v. 6). The gulf between Yhwh and the human shepherds widens again as Yhwh employs the semantically similar 'I will seek out' (בִּקֵּר) in v. 12, 'I will rescue' in vv. 10 and 12 and 'I will deliver' in v. 22. Yhwh succeeds where Israel's leaders failed. He is fit for the job; they are not.

Verse 16 lodges another set of reversals to heighten the contrast.

Shepherds—v. 4

1 the wounded you have not strengthened	אֶת־הַנַּחֲלֹת לֹא חֲזַקְתָּם
2 the sick you have not healed	וְאֶת־הַחֹלִי לֹא־רִפִּיתָם
3 the broken you have not bound up	וּלְנִשְׁבְּרֹת לֹא חִבַּשְׁתָּם
4 the strays you have not brought back	וְאֶת־הַנִּדְּרוֹת לֹא הִשְׁבַּתָּם
5 the lost you have not looked for	וְאֶת־הָאֲבֵדֹת לֹא בִקַּשְׁתָּם
6 you have ruled with force and ruthlessness	וּבְחֹזֶק־רִדִּיתָם אֹתָם וּבִפְרֹךְ

Yhwh—v. 16

5' the lost I will look for	אֶת־הָאֲבֵדֹת אֲבַקֵּשׁ
4' the strays I will bring back	וְאֶת־הַנִּדְּרוֹת אֲשִׁיב
3' the broken I will bind up	וּלְנִשְׁבְּרֹת אֲחַבֵּשׁ
2' the sick I will strengthen	וְאֶת־הַחֹלִי אֲחַזֵּק
but the fat and the strong I will destroy ⁵³	וְאֶת־הַשְׁמֵנָה וְאֶת־הַחֹזֶק אֲשַׁמֵּד
6' I will be a shepherd with justice	אֲרַעֲנָה בְּמִשְׁפָּט

⁵³ LXX presupposes אֲשַׁמֵּד ('I will guard') and assumes that the 'fat and strong' will receive less categorical treatment than the shepherds. Most scholars follow LXX here, as Zimmerli notes, *Ezekiel*, 2.208. But, proving the Hebrew *Vorlage* on the basis of one letter (ר or ד) is risky. Further, as discussed below, Yhwh blames the sheep designated 'the fat and strong' for 'scattering' the other sheep, an action he has already pinned on the shepherds. Merely 'guarding' the fat and strong is incommensurate with the retribution promised the shepherds. Thus, the MT stands. Cf. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 260 and Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 376. Also J.G. Rembry, 'Le Theme du berger dans l'oeuvre d'Ezekiel', *LASBF* 11 (1960-61): 113-144.

As is clear, Yhwh promises six actions. The first four, actions 5'-2', mirror and rectify the shortcomings of the shepherds, and perhaps the reversed order is a further statement of Yhwh's distinction. However, unlike the actions of the shepherds, only the first four of Yhwh's actions apply solely to the sheep whom the leaders of Israel abused.

3.2 The reversal

In spite of the scathing critique in vv. 2-15, Yhwh does not explicitly pronounce sentence on the errant shepherds. He only pledges to replace them. This absence creates a conceptual lacuna, particularly in view of other Ezekielian passages where leadership, both royal and non-royal, meet with Yhwh's vengeance (e.g., Ezekiel 9, 11, 13, 20). Cunningly, however, Ezekiel begins to fill this hole by demoting the shepherds to high-ranking members of his flock. In this way Yhwh promises suitable retribution for the destruction of the sheep that resulted from the shepherds' negligence.⁵⁴

Of the six actions attributed to Yhwh in v. 16, only the fifth (what would be 1') lacks a parallel in the earlier behaviour of the shepherds. Accounting for this divergence depends on identifying 'the fat and the strong'. Albeit faint, there are several indications that 'the fat and the strong' are the shepherds of Israel whom Yhwh now addresses as though they themselves were members of the flock. 1) The word חֹזֶק ('strength') occurs earlier only in v. 4 where חֹזֶק describes how the shepherds rule.⁵⁵ In v. 16,

⁵⁴ Thus expanding on Wong's recognition of retribution in vv. 7-10, *The Idea of Retribution*, 225-26.

⁵⁵ Admittedly, the pointing of v. 4—חֹזֶק—indicates a substantive while v. 16—חֹזֶק—is an adjective. However, in a non-pointed text the consonants themselves do not indicate a difference. LXX suggests that a tradition of distinguishing the parts of speech predated the insertion of vowels, but based on the consonants alone, this tradition arose in order to specify

however, the wielders of חֹזֶק have become identified by their actions. Yhwh does not describe his own rule with חֹזֶק, opting instead for מִשְׁפָּט ('justice'). But, in order to secure a firmer reversal of the shepherds, he pejoratively refers to members of the flock as חֹזֶק, the strong sheep. With this twist, Ezekiel conveys that those who have exercised force will meet a stronger force, the justice of Yhwh that tolerates no injustice.

2) The word glossed 'fat' (שֶׁמֶנֶה) is another indication that Yhwh has demoted the shepherds by electing now to refer to them as sheep.⁵⁶ In v. 3 the semantically-similar בְּרִיאָה ('fat') refers to the sheep whom the shepherds abused. In contrast, here the fat sheep cannot refer to ordinary members of the flock, else the thematic coherence of the verse would break. Here Yhwh professes his care for the people by promising to reverse the wrongs of the shepherds. Further, in v. 3 Yhwh evidences concern for the fat sheep; a reversal of that dynamic would fracture the coherence of Ezekiel 34. So, in order to signal the shift from sheep qua people to sheep qua shepherds, Yhwh uses שֶׁמֶנֶה instead of בְּרִיאָה; the return to the latter in v. 20 is difficult to explain unless Yhwh has linked it to a referent other than the sheep whose abuse he decried earlier.⁵⁷

the gloss of the consonants. In themselves, the consonantal words form an unmistakable connection between vv. 4 and 16 that is muted by the vowel points.

⁵⁶ LXX lacks 'the fat', and even Greenberg considers the word a gloss, *Ezekiel*, 2.701. Allen also discredits the gloss as out of place in the parallel with v. 4, *Ezekiel*, 2.157. But, as Block notes, perhaps LXX perceived an imbalance in the *Vorlage* and attempted its own harmonization, *Ezekiel*, 2.287. Textual evidence is thus an insufficient guide for interpretation.

⁵⁷ On the variant spelling בְּרִיָּה, Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.209.

3) In speaking directly to the flock, Yhwh further indicates the demotion of the shepherds, ‘As for you, my flock (צֹאן), I will judge between sheep (שֶׂה) and sheep (שֶׂה), between ram and male goat’ (v. 17). The reader anticipates a lawsuit against the whole of Yhwh’s flock, indeed, a critique of each member of the flock reminiscent of the ‘passing under the rod’ in 20:37. But Yhwh interrogates only a subset of the sheep—those who spoil the food and water of the flock. The masculine plural verb תִּרְעוּ (‘you feed’) suggests that Yhwh is not speaking to the flock (the feminine, צֹאן) but to the ‘rams and the male goats’ who prevent the whole flock from experiencing unsullied food and water (vv. 18-19). And this hunch draws support from v. 19 when Yhwh refers to his flock in the third person: ‘will my flock eat what is trampled with your feet...?’

Who are the ‘rams and male goats’? They are those whose violence against their fellow sheep resulted in a scattering (פִּיֹּץ) of the flock. Already in Ezekiel 34 Yhwh has pegged the shepherds of Israel as responsible for the scattering of the flock. So, to reassign or even redistribute the blame for deportation would partially defang Yhwh’s earlier tirade against the shepherds, leaving them less responsible than Yhwh’s earlier speech implied. Most plausibly, then, the rams and the male goats are the shepherds of Israel whom Yhwh has subsumed into the herds that he himself will shepherd.

Duguid contends that the rams and male goats of v. 17 refer to non-royal leaders within Israel, e.g., the elders.⁵⁸ And Block, with characteristic

⁵⁸ Duguid, *Leaders of Israel*, 121-122.

precision, adds that the leaders designated here ‘are not to be confused with the רֹעִים, “shepherds”’.⁵⁹ Duguid and Block plausibly identify these leaders as non-royal, but their arguments assume a transparency to the use of ‘shepherd’ in Ezekiel 34. As seen above, however, a precise referent to ‘shepherd’ is unobtainable, at least in this passage. The scattering already blamed on the shepherds (v. 6) also suggests that the rams and male goats are designations of demotion for the shepherds.⁶⁰ Similarly, in v. 22 Yhwh lampoons the bullying sheep for creating a situation in which the sheep are ‘prey’. But earlier, he attributed this problem to the neglectful shepherds (v. 8). The reasonable inference, then, is that, as Yhwh takes the shepherd’s mantle (v. 15), he demotes the neglectful shepherds to domineering sheep.⁶¹

With this tack, Yhwh underscores that the shepherds of Israel are subservient to Yhwh. Building on the subtle jabs of v. 5 (there was no shepherd’) and v. 8 (‘the shepherds shepherded themselves’), Yhwh now states outright that the shepherds are not shepherds at all. They are rams and male goats, admittedly, the dominant animals of the herd, but nonetheless subordinate to the owner of the flock who has now become the shepherd, the one, legitimate ruler of Israel.

3.3 Yhwh the shepherd

In critiquing the shepherds of Israel, Yhwh establishes himself as the true shepherd of Israel, the true king. As already seen, a significant component of

⁵⁹ Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.293.

⁶⁰ As also Ezek 46:18 that admonishes the people’s royal leader to ensure that the people are not ‘scattered’ by his sons’ greedy grabbing for property.

⁶¹ Joyce implies support of this conclusion, *Ezekiel*, 197.

Yhwh's rule is putting to rights the misdeeds of the human shepherds. The shepherds of Israel shepherded themselves, not the sheep, and Yhwh, of course, will do otherwise.

The artful reversal laid out in v. 16 poignantly clarifies that Ezekiel 34 is concerned with political dynamics. The final contrast, between lines 6 and 6' (in §3.1 above), pits Yhwh's exercise of authority against that of the human leaders. In this way, Yhwh is shown to be the legitimate and worthy king of Israel. Whereas the human shepherds 'ruled with force and ruthlessness' (line 6), Yhwh 'will shepherd with justice' (line 6'). As vv.4 and 16 catalogue the actions of the divine and human shepherds, the final action in each list encapsulates the first five. Thus, justice will be the defining feature of Yhwh's kingship. It is no coincidence, then, that the most common verb describing Yhwh in vv. 17-22 is 'to judge' (שפט).

In the political grammar of the Hebrew Bible, justice (משפט), of course, is a commonplace for a royal leader.⁶² Two examples of many suffice to show that Yhwh's interest in justice confirms not only his superiority to the shepherds of Israel but his suitability as the true shepherd, the true king of his people. In the controversial scene of 1 Samuel 8 when the elders of Israel requested a king, Yhwh instructs Samuel to teach the people about the 'justice (משפט) of the king who will reign over them' (v. 9).⁶³ Here 'justice' is

⁶² The literature is as immense as the themes it treats, e.g., M. Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

⁶³ Here the consistent (if wooden) gloss of משפט as 'justice' helps to highlight the irony of its use. The word's subtleties in 1 Samuel 8 are well-explored, as in P.K. McCarter *1 Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 162 and R. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History, Part Two, 1 Samuel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 85-88. For

ironical, however, as Samuel's speech shows: 'This will be the justice of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons...he will take your daughters...he will take your good fields...he will take...' (vv. 11-17). In spite of this 'justice', the people (no longer just the elders of v. 4) reiterate their intention to have a king who 'will judge (משפט) us...' (v. 20). Albeit backhandedly, justice functions as the key component of the king that Israel demands. In this regard, the complex figure of King David stands as a notable contrast, at least according to 2 Sam 8:15. Here, evaluating David's rule, the narrator records that David 'reigned over all Israel...doing justice (משפט) and righteousness for all the people'.⁶⁴

Psalm 72 also showcases justice in the royal sphere.⁶⁵ The psalm's dominant theme is a successful rule, including the important components of garnering wealth and subduing enemies.⁶⁶ The first two verses are programmatic, pleading with Yhwh to grant justice and righteousness.

its implications within the wider narrative, see the recent, complex work of S. Frolov, *The Turn of the Cycle: 1 Samuel 1-8 in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives* (BZAW 342; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 152-202.

⁶⁴ Among numerous parallels, e.g., 1 Kgs 10:9, '...In loving Israel forever, Yhwh made you king so that you may do justice and righteousness'. And, apropos of the present discussion, Jer 23:5, [the branch] 'shall do justice and rightness in the land'. The collocation of 'justice' and 'righteousness' finds recent evaluation in R.G. Smith, *The Fate of Justice and Righteousness During David's Reign: Rereading the Court History and Its Ethics According to 2 Samuel 8:15-20:26* (LHBOTS 508; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 42-63.

⁶⁵ Mein (*Ethics of Exile*, 98) also mentions Psalm 72 in discussing Ezekiel 34, but his focus is social justice not royal propriety. Cf. the use of 'justice and righteousness' in e.g., 18:5, 21, 27.

⁶⁶ Reading Psalm 72 within its royal milieu, e.g., S.R.A. Starbuck, *Court Oracles in the Psalms: The So-Called Royal Psalms in their Ancient Near Eastern Context* (SBLDS 172; Atlanta: SBL, 1996), 116-17.

O God, give your justice to the king
and your righteousness to the son of the king.
May he judge your people with righteousness
and your poor with justice.

As emblematic of royal ideology, the poetic repetition of justice and righteousness is striking, particularly as the opening verses of the psalm. Whatever else the psalm requests, justice and righteousness appear as foundational to good rule.⁶⁷

With this brief background, Yhwh's claims to justice in Ezekiel 34 appear equally clearly royal, given the theme of the oracle. As the true shepherd of Israel, he will rightly perform the duties of a king. The absence of 'righteousness' attributed to Yhwh is glaring in light of the examples noted above and all the more because Ezekiel is thus unaware of this pairing. Ezek 45:9 commands the 'princes (נְזִירִים) of Israel' to acquire 'justice and righteousness'.⁶⁸ However, in the whole of Ezekiel, righteousness and its derivatives never occur in relation to Yhwh suggesting that the absence of righteousness here is deliberate, perhaps in order to facilitate the portrayal of Yhwh as the leader who will reinstate justice and thus fill the void left by human leaders who failed to judge rightly between the sheep.

4. The dynamics of power

In promising to exercise justice, Yhwh demonstrates his suitability as the replacement for the shepherds of Israel. Yet this feature of Ezekiel 34 is

⁶⁷ Recently, W.J. Houston, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament* (LHBOTS 428; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 138-152.

⁶⁸ The identity of the audience in 45:9 is ambiguous but is unimportant here. For more, Chapter 7, §3.3.1.

hardly unexpected since Yhwh as the sole, legitimate ruler of Israel has become a commonplace in Ezekiel. What is surprising, however, given the one-sided dynamic of power established thus far, is Yhwh's intention to establish another human shepherd, the one he calls 'my servant David' (vv. 23-24). Indeed, the introduction of a new shepherd is a notable development in Ezekiel's political theology since now Yhwh is no longer the only legitimate ruler of Israel.

4.1 Functional unity

The four-fold repetition of the root רעה ('to shepherd, to pasture') in v. 23 is an initial indication of the importance of 'my servant David'.⁶⁹ Although the various forms denote different actions, the net effect is a quadrupling of Yhwh's notice that a human shepherd will share Yhwh's role as king of Israel. The structure of v. 23 intensifies this notification further. As seen below, the four forms of רעה construct a small chiasm that artfully highlights the salient content of Yhwh's determination to care for his sheep.⁷⁰

1 And I will raise up one shepherd over them	והקמתי עליהם רעה אחד
2 And my servant David will shepherd them	ורעה אתה את עבדי דוד
2' And he will shepherd them	הוא ירעה אתם
1' And he will be a shepherd for them.	והוא יהיה להן לרעה

⁶⁹ Scholarly attention to v. 23 focuses primarily on the modifier 'one', and leaps to consider the unifying power of the David figure, particularly in light of 37:15ff. Greenberg is distinct in considering the heavy grouping of shepherding terminology, *Ezekiel*, 2.702. National unity does flow from the rise of this shepherd, but this is not the burden of v. 23. The point, rather, is to identify the David figure with Yhwh.

⁷⁰ Allen plausibly sees a chiasm spanning vv. 23-24, centring on 'my servant' (*Ezekiel*, 1.160), but the chiastic arrangement in v. 24 is more secure since the servanthood of David is ancillary to his role as shepherd.

The former shepherds of Israel shepherded themselves (v. 8), but the new shepherd, working in tandem with Yhwh, will right their wrongs and will tend the sheep instead of himself.

Mention of only one shepherd recalls vv. 5 and 8 where the absence of a single shepherd led to the abuse of the sheep. Yet the problem of the absent shepherd of vv. 5 and 8 was seemingly remedied by Yhwh himself. In v. 10, as already noted, Yhwh overturns the negligence of the shepherds in declaring, ‘Behold, I, I myself will search’. In addition to the standard finite verb communicating first person action, Yhwh cements his personal involvement with the otherwise extraneous הִנְנִי (‘behold, I’). And in v. 15, having just declared in v. 14 ‘I will feed (רעה) them with good pasture (מִרְעָה)’, he again adds the unnecessary personal pronoun to underline his personal involvement, ‘I, I myself will shepherd’ (אֲנִי אֶרְעֶה). Yhwh has seemingly eliminated the possibility of any shepherd other than himself. The final sentence of the address to the shepherds shows unequivocally that Yhwh’s solution to the past abuses is to redress the wrongs himself: ‘I will be a shepherd with justice’.

And yet here, in v. 23, he unveils another option, implying that he will endow a human figure with his own traits.⁷¹ With this proposal, Yhwh blurs the distinction between divine and human agents. The monolithic authority structure established to this point in Ezekiel receives a notable development as Yhwh now appears to share his kingship. Read in conjunction with the preceding verses, the promise of the new shepherd explains how Yhwh will

⁷¹ In Ezekiel’s logic, the ideal shepherd is like Yhwh, not vice versa. *Pace* Brettler, *God is King*, 37.

accomplish his earlier pledges to tend his flock. Radically, Yhwh implies that he will invest this shepherd with his own qualities. Although not wholly equated with Israel's god, this figure uncannily resembles Yhwh himself because he will do what Yhwh himself had promised to do. The installation of the David figure does not result in a denial of Yhwh's own shepherding. Rather, both he and Yhwh will be shepherd over Israel. The ambiguity of shepherds in Ezekiel 34 deepens again.

4.2 Fundamental distinction

Still, several points of difference remain. 1) Yhwh outranks David, as is evident from Yhwh's capacity to initiate the rule of the shepherd: 'I will raise up (קם) over them one shepherd'. The idealized David owes his kingship to Yhwh. Striking parallels to this scenario occur in 2 Sam 7:12 where Yhwh says to David 'I will raise up (קם) your offspring after you'⁷² and in Jer 23:5 where, confounding Israel's shepherds, Yhwh declares, 'I will raise up (קם) for David a righteous branch, and he shall reign as king...'.⁷³ The authoritative hierarchy of Yhwh and the political leaders he establishes is thus not unique to Ezekiel 34. But, in light of the close alignment between Yhwh and the shepherd, the hierarchy is noteworthy here.

⁷² The verb קם is important throughout the Samuel narratives as a keyword related to royal power, e.g., in 1 Sam 13:14.

⁷³ As noted several times, the relationship between Deuteronomy and Ezekiel is too tendentious to permit substantive engagement in this study. However, even brief comparison of Deut 17:15 and Ezek 34:24 is suggestive for appreciating Ezekiel's political vision within the larger tradition. In both cases, Yhwh legitimates the monarch.

2) Yhwh states, 'I will be their god'. Of course, only Yhwh may legitimately claim to be the god of the people Israel. In owning this claim here, Yhwh breaks the shepherd motif that has governed all his actions to this point. This shift in terminology permits Yhwh to solidify the distinction between himself and his servant David. The two shall not be one, in spite of the similarities of their duties. However, as v. 31 shows, emphasizing his role as the god of Israel does not require Yhwh to relinquish his role as shepherd: 'And you shall be my flock'. If the people remain Yhwh's sheep, then he is still a shepherd. He is still the king, even though he has pledged to establish human royalty.

3) The title that Yhwh bequeaths to the shepherd, *nāšî'*, also signals a distinction.⁷⁴ In the Hebrew Bible, *nāšî'* carries several overlapping meanings related to an office of authority. Until fuller discussion in Chapter 7, the essential point is that the term distinguishes the two kings of Israel. The David figure receives the title *nāšî'* as a symbol of his subservience to Yhwh but not as a denial of his royalty.⁷⁵ He will function as a human extension of Yhwh himself, but the designation *nāšî'* implies a fundamental distinction between Shepherd and shepherd. The significance of this title emerges more clearly in brief comparison to a similar text.

⁷⁴ A transliteration of the Hebrew נָשִׂי suits better than both the common English gloss 'prince' or the Hebrew characters. The one is imprecise and the other cumbersome given the frequency with which this figure will feature in the remainder of this chapter and the next.

⁷⁵ Cf. Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.300. Zimmerli accounts for *nāšî'* as an archaic title meant to evoke reverence for the office that Yhwh will establish, *Ezekiel*, 2.218. But this is unlikely since earlier Ezekiel depicted the *nāšî'* as part of the problem in Judah, 7:27, 12:10-12, 21:12, 25, 22:6,

Already, Jeremiah 23 has featured as a foil for the distinctions drawn between Yhwh and the one shepherd of Ezekiel 34. There Yhwh's solution to the negligent shepherds is the Davidic 'righteous branch' whose royal designation is 'king', not 'prince'.⁷⁶ Jeremiah accentuates the kingliness of the branch by doubling the root מלך ('to reign as king'). The construction מלך מלך generally allows the gloss 'the king reigned'.⁷⁷ So, in Jer 23:5, מלך מלך may seem simply to describe the generic political conditions that will obtain when Yhwh raises up the branch. However, contextually, the subject of מלך is the branch itself/himself. The substantive מלך is not the subject but a predicate nominative that modifies the unstated subject—the branch. Linking the branch to David also signals royal identity and deepens the comparison with Ezekiel 34.

But a subtle difference between the Davids clarifies whom Ezekiel expects. Jeremiah promises a David who is qualified only by royal titles and actions. Ezekiel's David, however, bears the designation 'my servant'.⁷⁸ While both prophetic promises envision a similar ruler, the designation of Ezekiel's figure as Yhwh's servant stresses that the coming royal figure will operate in a submissive relationship with Yhwh. In both passages Yhwh will generate and

⁷⁶ The commentaries adequately discuss this contended term. Of recent value as well is O. Lipschits, "Here is a Man Whose Name is *Ṣemah*" (Zechariah 6:12), in *The Historian and the Bible: Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe* (ed. P.R. Davies and D.V. Edelman; LHBOTS 530; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 124-136.

⁷⁷ E.g. Gen 36:31 'before any king reigned (מלך מלך) for the Israelites' or 1 Sam 12:12 'a king shall reign (מלך מלך) over us'.

⁷⁸ The HB frequently refers to David as Yhwh's servant, e.g., 2 Sam 3:18, 7:5, and 1 Kgs 11:34.

share the political power that David will exercise, but Ezekiel, far more than Jeremiah, is at pains to underscore the direction of this cooperation.⁷⁹

Zimmerli and Joachim Jeremias helpfully clarify that the ‘servant’ always ‘denotes one who is subject and belongs to a master’.⁸⁰ And the title *nāšî*’ is Ezekiel’s clue that human royalty does not eclipse the divine but, instead, radiates the political prowess that Yhwh bestows.

4.3 Further development

In Ezekiel 34, even the establishment of a human king does not threaten Yhwh’s role as the true king of his people, hence the terminological safeguard *nāšî*’. This caution falls, however, in Ezekiel 37. At the climax of Yhwh’s promise to reunify Israel and Judah, he again mentions ‘my servant David’, echoing 34:23-24. But here Yhwh explicitly names the coming David ‘king’.⁸¹ The scrupulous efforts to maintain a hierarchy between Yhwh and the shepherd appear wasted and the uniqueness of Yhwh’s kingship appears dampened.

At the same time, earlier in the book Ezekiel has not shunned recognizing human leaders as king of Yhwh’s people. Although perhaps a

⁷⁹ Accordingly, McKane protests against opinions that tie Jeremiah’s Branch too closely to Yhwh resulting in ‘the Davidic king sunk in an ocean of theocentricity’, *Jeremiah*, 1.563.

⁸⁰ W. Zimmerli and J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (London: SCM, 1957), 14. The authors isolate Ezekiel 34, 37 and Zech 3:8 as specifically messianic instances of ‘my servant’ (51). But, as J. Fitzmyer points out, without an explicit designation of the figure as ‘anointed’, strictly speaking these are not messianic passages but politically charged descriptions of hope for a coming era, *The One Who Is to Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 40, n.30. Thus a more accurate reading of the Davidic servant must hear the political overtones and grapple with the power dynamics that this terminology highlights.

⁸¹ Malleable Hebrew word order permits 37:25 to have דוד עבדִי (‘David my servant’) while 37:24 has עבדִי דוד (‘my servant David’) mimicking 34:23-24. Cf. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 402.

stereotyped reference, the historical introduction of 1:2 refers to ‘King Jehoiachin’. And, albeit generically, 7:27 refers to ‘the king’ mourning in the face of imminent attack, suggesting that, while Ezekiel may not dignify the king with a personal name, neither does he deny that a man holds the office of king.⁸² Further, as already seen, Ezekiel 34 addresses a lengthy diatribe to the rulers of Israel, among whom are certainly the kings whose reign Yhwh will replace with his own and with the establishment of a final shepherd/king who will right the wrongs of his forebears.

So, in referring to David as ‘king’, Ezek 37:24 does not jettison Ezekielian protocol of hailing Yhwh’s kingship as supreme. In spite of the intimate link between the Davidic shepherd and Yhwh, Ezekiel 34 has already established that Yhwh still ranks supreme. The explicit use of ‘king’ in 37:24 does not interfere with the stated power dynamic between Yhwh and his servant David. As if to confirm this, the terminological diminution of David returns in v. 25: ‘David my servant will be *nāšî*’ for them’.⁸³

The titular change from *nāšî*’ to ‘king’ registers a minor development in the depiction of Yhwh’s kingship. Unlike in Ezekiel 34, Yhwh’s own royal persona is understated to the point of disappearance; there is no mention of

⁸² Though on F. Raurell’s account, the LXX may do this, ‘The Polemical Role of the *APXONTES* and *AΦΗΤΟΥΜΕΝΟΙ* in Ez LXX’, in *EHB*, 85-89. J. Lust allows this but prefers the ‘easier’ explanation of translational inconsistency, ‘Exegesis in LXX Ezekiel: The Longer “Pluses” and Ezek 43:1-9’, in *VI Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Jerusalem 1986* (ed. C.E. Cox; SCS 23; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 217-221.

⁸³ Greenberg (*Ezekiel*, 2.756) satisfactorily explains that ‘king’ suited the context of a unified Israel; a single nation needs a king. But, to maintain the orientation of Yhwh’s kingship dictating the rule of the David figure, a return to *nāšî*’ was necessary.

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Yhwh's kingship in the midst of the outright statement that the coming David will be king. But this feature of Israel's restoration harmonizes Ezekiel 34 and 37. In both chapters, the appearance of the David figure creates a paradox regarding Yhwh's kingship as Yhwh's royalty largely fades in the presence of the Davidic *nāšî'*. In 34:24, Yhwh claims his divine role, 'I will be their god', immediately prior to employing *nāšî'* in reference to the one whom he has already named 'my servant David'. And in 37:23, following the generic promise of king in v. 22 and again prior to mention of the Davidic ruler, Yhwh centres his identity in the divine action of forgiveness, again stating, 'I will be their god'. At the same time, Ezekiel 34 maintains Yhwh's royalty, continuing to portray him as a shepherd concerned with 'my flock, the human flock of my pasture' (v. 31).

Adding still further to the paradox of the *nāšî'*, Ezekiel 40-48 evidence a high interest in Yhwh's kingship but also grant an important position to the *nāšî'*. Discussion of these issues awaits Chapter 7, but noting the interplay of the *nāšî'* and Yhwh's kingship in 40-48 highlights the unusualness of Ezekiel 34 and 37 where, in the final analysis, Yhwh's kingship seems partially muted. Do the two encounters with a future David raise an obstacle to a coherent picture of Yhwh's kingship? While avoiding an affirmative answer, the considerations here betray the challenge of reconciling the strong strain of Yhwh's kingship that permeates the remainder of the book with the faded, if not absent, picture of his kingship presented in the latter halves of Ezekiel 34 and 37.

But, in the logic of Ezekiel, there is no real disjunction and thus no need for reconciling divergent positions. The Davidic ruler, like his eponymous ancestor, is a devotee of Yhwh, to use the older phrase, a ‘man after Yhwh’s heart’.⁸⁴ Yet, of course, unlike David of Jerusalem, Ezekiel’s David will act in unreserved accordance with Yhwh. His actions will mirror Yhwh’s; Ezekiel 34 shows this plainly as the shepherd Yhwh recruits and endows the shepherd David for the very actions Yhwh himself has pledged to undertake. Ezekiel 37 does not show this directly; however, as a recapitulation of Ezekiel 34, set in a different context, freighted with another literary agenda, the absence of alignment with Yhwh is unproblematic. Ezekiel 34 carries the ideological load of assimilating the Davidic *nāšî’* to Yhwh himself. And Ezekiel 37 simply shows the centrality of the *nāšî’* within Yhwh’s restoration of his people.

4.4 Restored monarchy?

Numerous examinations of the Davidic *nāšî’* in Ezekiel query whether Ezekiel envisions a restoration of the monarchy in a restored Israel.⁸⁵ In three words: yes and no. As seen above, the *nāšî’* is a royal figure. Although portrayed as subservient to Yhwh, the *nāšî’* is nevertheless a king, as Ezek 37:22 states explicitly. And, notably, the David figure receives the title ‘king’ in the context of the reunification of political Israel, precisely as Yhwh’s own

⁸⁴ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 478.

⁸⁵ M.A. Sweeney even suspects that Ezekiel’s royal hopes build on the persona of Josiah as a model king, ‘The Royal Oracle in Ezekiel 37:15-28: Ezekiel’s Reflection on Josiah’s Reform’, in *Israel’s Prophets and Israel’s Past: Festschrift John H. Hayes* (ed. B.E. Kelle and M.B. Moore; LHBOTS 446; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 239-253.

kingship has receded from view. Ezekiel envisions a human political leader for a human political entity.

At the same time, the dynamics of his kingship diverge from a standard pattern of human kingship since he rules concurrent with Yhwh. In spite of the muted tones of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel 37, the text offers no clue that Yhwh's kingship is somehow merely theological, as if, after all, Ezekiel has reverted to common ancient Near Eastern beliefs about the deity's kingship. After all, the monarchy envisioned here depends upon Yhwh's kingship as the political force that structures Israelite society. The human king is simply a crucial dimension of Yhwh's rule, namely the human means by which he will continue to exercise his authority over his people. Jon Levenson is correct, then, that the authors of Ezekiel 'have not discarded kingship. They have reinterpreted it'.⁸⁶ But, as discussed below (Chapter 7), Levenson's notions merit sharper alignment with Yhwh's kingship, the impetus and telos of the reinterpretation.

Another indication of Ezekiel's complex perspective on the human monarchy is the time scale of the Davidic *nāšî*'s rule. At an undisclosed future point, Ezekiel sees the *nāšî*' exercising rule in an unending period of peace. Ezekiel 34 contributes less to this idea than does Ezekiel 37, but the core concern is still visible. For example, Yhwh states that his sheep 'will not again become prey' (v. 22). The definitive phrase 'not again' excludes a return of the present circumstances. In detailing the happy ramifications for both sheep

⁸⁶ J. Levenson, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48* (HSM 10; Missoula: Mont: Scholars, 1976), 68.

and the vegetation (vv. 25-31), Yhwh rearticulates the certainty of this peace, highlighting its relation to political stability: ‘they will not again become prey to the nations’. Yhwh will establish conditions in which freedom from oppression becomes the only possibility for his people.

The literary proximity of the promise of peace and the promise of the Davidic shepherd strongly suggests that Ezekiel sees this future peace as directly linked to the human king whom Yhwh will establish. But the dynamic of power in Ezekiel 34, even as expanded in Ezekiel 37, indicates that the Davidic figure is passive in establishing this utopian future. Yhwh will initiate it, ‘on a day of clouds and darkness’, language evoking ‘the day of Yhwh’ in which divine cataclysm falls upon his enemies.⁸⁷ The true king/shepherd of Israel will ensure that his people/sheep obtain an unending regime of peace that he orchestrates but that is overseen by David, the king/shepherd who mediates Yhwh’s rule. Lemke (among others) may be correct to see the practical outworking of this relationship as an analogue to the widespread notion that the king was an extension of Yhwh.⁸⁸ But this resolution to the tension of dual kingship does not invalidate Yhwh’s own rule. After all, in Ezekiel 34, he has inserted himself as the replacement of the bad shepherds. Thus, his role corresponds to the good shepherd, not to the deity of tradition. The emphasis of the passage lands so heavily on Yhwh’s own

⁸⁷ E.g., Zeph 1:15, Joel 2:2. J. Lust, “‘Gathering and Return’ in Jeremiah and Ezekiel”, in *Le Livre de Jeremie: le prophete et son milieu, les oracles et leur transmission* (ed. P. Bogaert; BETL 54; Leuven: Leuven University, 1981), 139-140.

⁸⁸ Lemke, ‘Life in the Present’, 174.

kingship that excessive attention to the Davidic *nāšî*’ threatens to mistake the overarching interest that Yhwh himself will shepherd his people.

4.5 Yhwh’s kingship

As noted repeatedly throughout this study, divine and royal are not mutually exclusive designations for Yhwh. If anything, Ezekiel has a penchant for subsuming the divine into the royal so that Yhwh appears as the supreme monarch whom the world, and particularly his people Israel, must recognize. The final verses of Ezekiel 34 support this assessment of Ezekiel’s Yhwh. As noted earlier, the appearance of the Davidic *nāšî*’ seems to condition Yhwh’s self-description as more divine than royal. Thus, vv. 30-31 three times refer to Yhwh as ‘the god of Israel’. But, Yhwh’s divine status does not preclude his royal status.

To the contrary, the royal actions of Yhwh facilitate recognition of his role as Israel’s god. As a shepherd tending his sheep, Yhwh promises secure conditions for the thriving of his people. This is a royal pledge, not least because Yhwh levels a territorial claim by promising to establish the sheep in his own pasture.⁸⁹ And as the king’s guarantee takes effect, the people recognize that he is their god. In other words, they ascertain the fullness of their king’s identity. This is the knowledge of Yhwh that so permeates Ezekiel, a concrete apprehension that Yhwh is king and thus deservedly demands the loyalty of his people which they demonstrate by granting to him the worship that he as their god requires.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Cf. Chapter 5, §3.2.3.2 and Chapter 7, §4.3

⁹⁰ Cf. Chapter 8, §2.1.

Ezekiel 37 foregrounds this concern more poignantly still, couching the secure future as an unending era of unity established by the political action of Yhwh who finally receives the worship that is his due.⁹¹ In v. 21 Yhwh promises to gather the people from the nations, reversing the scattering of the errant shepherds and echoing the earlier promise in Ezekiel 34. As before, the ‘nations’ are political entities who, in the vacuum created by defective human leadership, have assumed power over Yhwh’s people. As Israel’s true authority, however, Yhwh countermands the demands of other nations and restores his people to his land, displaying his royal power.⁹² David Demson puts it well, ‘God exercises his power in order to guarantee the political fulfilment’ of the people long oppressed and fractured by foreign powers.⁹³

Consonant with Ezekiel 34, Yhwh establishes the Davidic *nāšî*’ as the human extension of his rule. Notably, though, Yhwh does not cede power. Rather, he empowers the *nāšî*’ as the agent who maintains his own authority.

⁹¹ A. Crane argues that Davidic *nāšî*’ is more a ‘worshipper’ than a ‘warrior’, *Israel’s Restoration: A Textual-Comparative Exploration of Ezekiel 36-39* (VTSup 122; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 122-123. Although *nāšî*’ functions cultically, at least in chapters 40-48, Crane’s contrast may be misleading. For, in eschewing warfare, the *nāšî*’ is no less a political figure. As seen in Ezekiel 20 (Chapter 5) and to anticipate Chapter 7, worship of Yhwh is an inherently political enterprise in its confession of Yhwh alone as the supreme authority. So, although irenic, the *nāšî*’ is far from merely a ‘spiritual’ leader. His remit is thoroughly grounded in the political life of the envisioned community. For more extensive critique of Crane’s position, Block, ‘Transformation of Royal Ideology’, 238-239, n.85.

⁹² On return as a royal theme, G. Widengren ‘The Gathering of the Dispersed’, *SEÅ* 41-42 (1976-1977): 224-234. Cf. Chapter 5, §3.4.2 on Deuteronomy 4. Thus, *pace* Zimmerli (‘Der “neue Exodus”’, 193-94), Ezekiel 20 is not the only juxtaposition of return and kingship in Ezekiel.

⁹³ D.E. Demson, ‘Divine Power Politics: Reflections on Ezekiel 37’, in *Intergerini Parietis Septum* (Eph 2:14): *Essays Presented to Markus Barth on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. D.Y. Hadidian; PTMS 33; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1981), 98.

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Both are king, but, as earlier, the purpose of this arrangement is the acknowledgement of Yhwh's own authority, not the *nāšî*'s. And, that recognition extends geographically to the nations and chronologically to the ages, that is, forever (v. 28), hinting the next and final depiction of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel.

Conclusion

In earlier chapters, Yhwh's kingship has appeared as constant and transcendent. Ezekiel 34, however, presents an alternative picture. Here, he only acquires the royal identification after demonstrating the failures of the human rulers. What is more, after establishing his own right to kingship, Yhwh promises to establish a single shepherd over his people. Ezekiel 34 thus seems to blur the sharp lines drawn to this point in the book. Yet, as hinted above, the developments of Ezekiel 34 do not derail the univocal case for Yhwh's kingship advanced in earlier sections of the book.

Ezekiel 34 slots into the larger world of Ezekiel in which Yhwh's kingship is commonplace, established by the awesome vision of Ezekiel 1. The expressions of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel 34, like in Ezekiel 20, rise out of historical contingencies that prevent full submission to his rule. Ezekiel 34 thus presents a dual picture of Yhwh's kingship. He both is king and will be king. In this way, Ezekiel 34 sets up the final, depiction of Yhwh's kingship, the towering and baffling vision of Ezekiel 40-48.

CHAPTER 7—THE FULLNESS OF KINGSHIP (EZEKIEL 40-48)

1. Introduction

Ezekiel's fifth overt expression of Yhwh's kingship is arguably the most spectacular. In the climactic scene of Ezek 43:1-12, the prophet envisions the glory of Yhwh entering the temple. As he looks on, he hears a voice uttering, 'this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet' (v. 7), an unmistakably royal declaration. Although never explicitly identified as such, the voice is Yhwh's. Who else could legitimately assert his intention to 'dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever' (v. 7)? After laying claim to the temple as his royal abode, Yhwh continues speaking to the prophet, offering what amounts to an accession speech (vv. 7-12) that sketches the issues central to his reign: human power structures, territory and law. In broaching these issues the speech is also a microcosm of Ezekiel 40-48, making the entire vision an exposition of Yhwh's kingship. So, although brief, the assertion of Yhwh's kingship has hermeneutical import for the entire final vision. As before, then, this chapter begins with a defence of reading the textual unit as a literary whole in order to uncover the brilliance of Ezekiel's encounter with the deity-king.

1.1 Textual strata

The organization of Ezekiel 40-48 has long befuddled its readers. The vision opens with the methodical tour of a temple (40-42). The conclusion of this tour sees Ezekiel prostrate as Yhwh bursts across the Eastern horizon and surges into the temple (43:1-12) where he announces his kingship. Instructions regarding the extraordinary altar follow (43:13-27). The temple tour resumes briefly (44:1-4) only to be interrupted by various regulations pertaining to the prophet himself and the priests (44:5-31). Land matters are next (45:1-8).

Chapter 7—The Fullness of Kingship

Directions for the *nāšî'* occupy a lengthy chunk of the vision (45:9-46:19) before the final stage of the tour (46:19-47:12) shows Ezekiel the temple cooking quarters and the mellifluous water streaming from the temple. The vision concludes with additional land allocations (47:13-48:35).

The links between these sections are not intuitive, nor are these sections wholly coherent in themselves. While the notorious moniker 'crazy quilt' may overstate the challenges,¹ few would dispute that 'it is difficult to speak of these final chapters...as forming a literary unity'.² Consequently, varying attempts to resolve the perceived confusion dot the scholarly landscape. A majority endeavour to distinguish textual strata in order to illuminate the rationale for the text's development. For example, Thilo Rudnig finds five layers of development in 43:1-9 alone, though notably he doubts whether an original visionary experience can be distilled from the textual developments.³ Similarly, in addition to numerous small expansions, Hartmut Gese discovers three major layers: a core, a *nāšî'* stratum, and a Zadokite stratum.⁴ And Steven Tuell sees both an Ezekielian original and a Persian-period expansion.⁵

¹ As offered by S.S. Tuell, 'The Temple of Vision of Ezekiel 40-48: A Program for Restoration?', *PEGLBS* 2 (1982): 98.

² B. Vawter and L.J. Hoppe, *A New Heart. A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 186.

³ T.A. Rudnig, *Heilig und Profan: redaktionskritische Studien zu Ez 40-48* (BZAW 287; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 82-98. For the whole of Ezekiel 40-48 Rudnig sees twelve strata, 373-74.

⁴ H. Gese, *Der Verfassungsentwurf des Ezechiel (Kap. 40-48) traditions-geschichtlich untersucht* (BHT 25; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1957). Gese's theories impacted Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 2.325-552), whose commentary is riddled with approving references to Gese.

⁵ S.S. Tuell, *The Law of the Temple in Ezekiel 40-48* (HSM 49; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 18, 175-78. Tuell's new commentary on Ezekiel follows his older theory but at a more popular level, *Ezekiel*

These examples are merely illustrative of the attempts to make sense of the seams in the quilt of Ezekiel 40-48. Yet, in spite of the vigorous and varied approaches to these nine chapters, no view has achieved consensus, nor is consensus likely if the history of scholarship is any indication.⁶ Of course, scholars such as Moshe Greenberg and Menahem Haran balk at the redaction-critical studies, arguing that Ezekiel 40-48 boasts an intelligible albeit unusual arrangement.⁷ But such stonewalling against the work of Rudnig, Gese, and Tuell fails to account for the jarring transitions and the patent problems of the vision. Kalinda Rose Stevenson raises a similar objection to redaction criticism, stating that for Ezekiel 40-48, ‘the issue is not that someone pieced together scraps, but that someone wanted a quilt’.⁸

While the impulse to read the vision as a composite is legitimate—it is, after all, the tack this study will take—the enterprise of discovering the history of the text is no less legitimate. And scholars who discount redaction studies risk betraying a blindness to the difficulties of the text. As noted in previous chapters, both diachronic and synchronic readings benefit the academy. For Ezekiel 40-48, reconstructing the text-history merits consideration given the counterintuitive arrangement of temple-tour,

(NIBC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2009). Discussion here will thus primarily reference his monograph.

⁶ For a recent survey, Rudnig, *Heilig*, 5-35.

⁷ M. Greenberg, ‘The Design and Themes of Ezekiel’s Program of Restoration’, *Int* 38 (1984): 181-208. M. Haran, ‘The Law-Code of Ezekiel XL-XLVIII and Its Relation to the Priestly School’, *HUCA* 30 (1979): 45-71.

⁸ K.R. Stevenson, *Vision*, 7.

theophany, regulations, and land distribution. The baffling vision beckons repeated attempts to simplify the complicated and explain the cryptic.

1.2 Synchronic reading

Nevertheless, this study opts for a primarily synchronic reading of Ezekiel 40-48, beginning from the obvious unity of Ezekiel 40-48 as a literary whole. Like Ezekiel 1-3 and 8-11, Ezekiel 40-48 purports to be a narrative of the prophet's 'divine vision' (40:2) in which he saw a temple from which Yhwh would reign. Although a divine monologue interrupts, the vision is constructed upon the tour motif.

The explicit notice of Yhwh's kingship occurs in 43:7, and by nearly all accounts this scene (43:1-12) is the climax of the vision.⁹ The remaining two-thirds of the vision (43:17-48:35) are thus outworkings of Yhwh's kingship and the first third (40:1-42:20) is the plot development. So, even if modern eyes struggle to find a rationale for every facet of Ezekiel 40-48, at least the text's arrangement offers an interpretive crux in Yhwh's declaration of kingship. Taking the vision as a literary whole rather than pursuing its developmental layers acknowledges the editorial placement of the climactic sequence and endeavours to read the vision in its shadow. Or, in the more familiar image, the royal ripples only receive attention after evaluating the royal stone itself.

The multitude of redactional studies lacks definitive standards for how to distinguish the textual strata.¹⁰ Every attempt to identify and sort the textual accretions must judge the suitability of previous attempts, and, where divergent, offer still further explanations. The complications multiply, yet frequently clarity remains elusive. Tuell, for example, labels Cooke's view

⁹ E.g. by Hals who calls it 'the central pericope for the organization of all chs. 40-48', *Ezekiel*, 288.

¹⁰ Cf. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 7-16.

that 43:6-9 are secondary as ‘extreme and unnecessary’, but, ironically, Tuell himself takes 43:7b-9 as an expansion.¹¹ Current space constraints require a simpler approach that, although far from ideal, generally reads the text as tradition has preserved it in the MT. So, on the whole, a presumption of intelligibility drives this study of Ezekiel 40-48. The longstanding tradition that sees a textual unity in these chapters allows modern interpreters to approach the text in order to hear its ancient harmonies rather than imposing today’s tune upon it. Appreciating the symphonic resonance of Yhwh’s kingship requires this interpretive stance. And, as discussed below, the effort to listen does not disappoint.

2. Kingship established

A foray into the royal universe of Ezekiel 40-48 rightly begins with the explicit statement of Yhwh’s kingship in 43:7. However, before exploring Yhwh’s royal claim, a look to the preceding verses will contextualize the declaration of kingship.

2.1 Features of 43:1-6

Verse 3 cites a visual similarity with the ‘divine visions’ of Ezekiel 1-3, 8-11,¹² but the comparison is vague, noting only bare similarity.¹³ The onus thus falls on the reader to remember the specifics. For example, both earlier visions shared an appearance of a throne (1:26, 10:1). Here in Ezekiel 43, the throne is not overtly noted. Instead, the deafening rumble of the creatures/cherubim (cf. 1:24, 3:12-13, 10:5) and the brilliance of the glory trigger memories of the earlier visions. But, the centrality of the throne in the earlier visions validates

¹¹ Tuell, *Law*, 41 n.60.

¹² Regardless of whether v. 3 is a scribal gloss, as Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.414.

¹³ Accounting for the slim details tends toward speculation, as Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 554.

the presumption that the observation here sprang from a sight of the divine throne.¹⁴ So, even before Yhwh speaks, the vision has acquired a royal presence. Yhwh's speech in v. 7 is thus the fulfilment and development of the royal motif.

Although v. 7 does not identify Yhwh as the speaker, the assertion of kingship must belong to Yhwh, since only the god of Israel could properly adopt the temple as his everlasting home.¹⁵ Further, v. 6 underscores the speaker's identity:¹⁶

'And I heard someone speaking	וַאֲשַׁמַע מִדְּבָר
to me from the temple;	אֵלַי מִהַבִּית
now the man was standing beside me'.	וְאִישׁ הָיָה עִמָּדִי

The prophet states the origin of the speaking that he heard. After the tour of Ezekiel 40-42, only Yhwh's glory has entered the temple; the obvious inference, then, is that Yhwh is speaking. More artfully, the prophet affirms that the man who led him through the temple complex was beside him at the moment the voice emanated from the temple.¹⁷

¹⁴ Pace Middlemas, 'Exclusively Yahweh', 316, n.5.

¹⁵ The absence of explicit identification can have nothing to do with reverence for the divine name, for it occurs in 43:4, 5 and 18. Pace Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 463.

¹⁶ Gese suggests a third feature, following the medieval commentator Rashi in seeing the unusual *hitpa'el* participle מִדְּבָר as a theologically loaded term and thus as further identification of Yhwh, *Verfassungsentwurf*, 34. Cf. Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.574, n.8. However, the limited evidence (elsewhere only Num 7:89 and Ezek 2:2) plus the heavy semantic overlap between the *hitpa'el* and the *piel* of דָּבַר suggest that Gese's reading is ill-advised. Further, the minute difference between the pointing of the *hitpa'el* מִדְּבָר and *piel* מְדַבֵּר allows for a scribal mistake that substituted *hireq* for *shewa*. Cf. J. Milgrom, *Numbers* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: JPS, 1990), 305. In the end, then, a realistic approach to מִדְּבָר admits the mystery of the participle's form but not its theological significance.

¹⁷ MT lacks the article on 'man', but LXX adds it, as also numerous commentators, e.g., Cooke and Zimmerli.

Chapter 7—The Fullness of Kingship

Like the two other ‘divine visions’, the vision of 40-48 follows a narrative sequence built by repeated *wayyiqtol* verbs. As noted above, the scene of 43:1-12 is the climax of this narrative. Within this scene, the penultimate narrative action is Ezekiel’s hearing the voice from the temple, and the speech from Yhwh (vv. 7-12) is the final action.¹⁸ This means that the statement locating the man at Ezekiel’s side describes an action off the main storyline; it is an explanatory detail but does not advance the narrative. Other narratives in the Hebrew Bible display similar tangential details.¹⁹ For example, Exo 2:23-25 recount the events precipitating Yhwh’s intrusion into the suffering of the slaves in Egypt. But the next verse deviates from this narrative, offering a new thread to the story: ‘now Moses was shepherding the flock’ (3:1). The ensuing development of the narrative shows that this diversion from the previous storyline is significant because with 3:1 the story shifts to consider Moses’ own role in the deliverance that Yhwh intimated in 2:23-25.

Likewise, in Ezek 43:6, the phrase ‘now the man...’ is far more than an easily discarded detail²⁰ or the prophet’s retrospective expression of relief at having familiar company in the face of Yhwh’s awesome return.²¹ Nor does

¹⁸ Strictly speaking, vv. 13-27 fall within Yhwh’s temple speech, but present purposes exclude their consideration for now.

¹⁹ In each case the narrative is interrupted by the construction showcased in Ezek 43:7, e.g., 1 Sam 2:11, ‘now the boy [Samuel] was serving Yhwh (וַתִּנְעַם הָיָה מְשָׁרֵת אֶת־יְהוָה)’ and 2 Sam 3:6, ‘now Abner was strengthening himself (וַיַּבְּזֵר הָיָה מִתְחַזֵּק)...’.

²⁰ T.A. Rudnig, ‘Ezechiel 40-48. Die Vision vom neuen Tempel und der neuen Ordnung im Land’, in Pohlmann, *Hesekiel/Ezechiel*, 2.572-573.

²¹ Block suggests that the man would have ‘reassured’ Ezekiel and thus his presence is noted, *Ezekiel*, 2.580.

the deliberate syntax noting the man's location need explanation as a feature of Late Biblical Hebrew.²² After all, the verbal construction *היה + participle* enjoys a wide distribution in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, the point is to locate the man (אִישׁ) outside the temple at the moment that Ezekiel heard the speaking proceeding from the temple.²³ The result is an underscoring of the negative point that it is not the bronze man who speaks from the temple but Yhwh, the only legitimate claimant to the temple as a royal dwelling. So crucial is Yhwh's kingship that Ezekiel adds an otherwise unimportant clause to confirm that only Yhwh claims the temple as his royal abode. The immediate context of the royal declaration in 43:7 thus provides initial support for the contention that Yhwh's claim to royal power is the prominent feature of Ezekiel 40-48.

2.2 Features of Ezekiel 38-39

In the editorial arrangement of the MT, Ezekiel 38-39 heighten the royal declaration of 43:7 by building anticipation for the climactic expression of Yhwh's kingship.²⁴ The oracles open with a confrontation between Yhwh and

²² Pace M. Rooker, *Biblical Hebrew in Transition: The Language of the Book of Ezekiel* (JSOTSup 90; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 108.

²³ Cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.415.

²⁴ As is well-known, the 2nd-3rd century Greek Papyrus 967 (P967) omits MT 36:23c-38 and places MT 38-39 before MT 37. This alternate order somewhat mutes Yhwh's kingship by separating his war against Gog from the triumphal return of 43:1-12, emphasizing instead the peaceful unity Israel will enjoy under the reign of the Davidic *nāšîʿ*. Due to the present focus, further analysis of the problems P967 raises must be deferred to the other studies of the topic. On the priority of P967: S.S. Scatolini Apóstolo, 'Ezek 36, 37, 38 and 39 in Papyrus 967 as Pre-text for Re-reading Ezekiel', in *Interpreting Translation: Studies on the LXX and Ezekiel in Honour of Johan Lust* (ed. F. García Martínez and M. Vervenne; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 331-357. Advocating separate textual traditions: J. Flanagan, 'Papyrus 967 and the Text of Ezekiel: Parablepsis or an Original Text?', in *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (ed. C.A. Evans and H.D. Zacharias; LSTS 70; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 105-116. Flanagan's article offers a current bibliography.

Gog, the ‘prince, chief of Meshech and Tubal’.²⁵ By Yhwh’s instigation, Gog becomes the head of all who oppose Yhwh. Not only will the major powers of the earth—Persia, Cush, Put—fall under Gog’s ensign but also armies from ‘the remote parts of the north’ (38:6).²⁶ As elsewhere in Ezekiel, ‘the north’ connotes a distant realm whose inhabitants are stylized figures. In this case, the north colours Gog’s cohorts, the hordes of Beth-Togarmah, as quintessentially dark forces in opposition to Yhwh.²⁷ And, as the oracle develops, ‘the north’ expands to become the origin of Gog as well (38:15, 39:2). In turn, Yhwh’s encounter with Gog becomes not merely a battle between the leader of Israel (Yhwh) and the leader of the obscure Meshech and Tubal but between the commanders of epic forces. By definition, then, Yhwh engages in political provocation. If Gog is a royal warrior, then Yhwh is greater still.²⁸ Although not explicitly designated ‘king’, Yhwh fits the part by addressing defiant challenges to the royal leader of cosmic darkness. And the

²⁵ Identifying Gog and the territories associated with him has long vexed readers but demands more space than currently available. The point here is Gog’s role as a foil to Yhwh’s great display of political dominance. A general consensus hails the inadvisability of naming a historical figure, e.g., P.E. Fitzpatrick, *The Disarmament of God: Ezekiel 38-39 in Its Mythic Context* (CBQMS 37; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2004). But a recent exception is J. Galambush, ‘Necessary Enemies: Nebuchadnezzar, Yhwh and Gog in Ezekiel 38-39’, in *Israel’s Prophets and Israel’s Past*, 254-267. S. Bøe catalogues older opinions, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 34-39 as Pre-text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10* (WUNT 2.135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 91-107.

²⁶ Gog’s army comes from each point of the compass as charted by Bøe, *Gog and Magog*, 107.

²⁷ A. Lauha, *Zaphon: der Norden und die Nordvölker im Alten Testament* (AASF B49.2; Helsinki: Finnish Academy of Science, 1943), 53. Cf. ‘the princes of the north’, 32:30.

²⁸ Block recognizes this parallel between Yhwh and Gog but not the royal identity, focusing instead on the role as military leader, ‘Gog and Magog in Ezekiel’s Eschatological Vision’, in *‘The Reader Must Understand’: Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (ed. K.E. Brower and M.W. Elliott; Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 101.

authority with which Yhwh addresses Gog indicates that here Yhwh is a supreme political figure.

Another indication of Yhwh's royalty is the preponderance of military terms that load the battle depictions. As Gog advances in battle, Yhwh will fight with the weapon of a king—a sword (38:21), and his victory will be secured when he knocks the bow and arrows from Gog's hand (39:3), indicating combat prowess reminiscent of a warrior king. Yet, returning to the ambiguity so common in Ezekiel's depiction of Yhwh, the deity-king's battle accoutrements go beyond the ordinary tools of a king. Yhwh will hurl nature's weapons against Gog: hail, rain, fire, sulfur and even the mountains themselves (38:20-22). The royal Yhwh is also the divine Yhwh, which Yhwh himself admits in summarizing the affect of the battle, 'I am Yhwh their god' (39:22, 28).

With this blending of divine and political, the battle against Gog anticipates the climactic scene in which Israel's god will exhibit the fullness of his kingship (Ezek 43:1-12).²⁹ In Ezekiel 38-39, Yhwh's defeat of an archetypal political menace results in both peace for a united Israel within her own land (39:9, 28) and unity with Yhwh himself (39:29). The vision of 40-48, with its climax in 43:1-12, is thus an expansion and specification of how the divine and political spheres unite.

2.3 Royal declaration

Although brief, the immediate prelude to Yhwh's declaration of kingship (43:1-6) situates the assertion of v. 7 within a royal context. The net effect, then, is a fulfilment of expectation and an enhancement of the royalty that

²⁹ Again, this conclusion hinges on the MT chapter order. Cf. S. Niditch, 'Ezekiel 40-48 in Visionary Context', *CBQ* 48 (1986): 208-224.

Yhwh claims, particularly against the backdrop of the Gog story. As throughout the book of Ezekiel, here Yhwh's kingship arises with such emphasis that royalty and divinity appear inextricably entwined.

Attention to the editorial problems of Ezekiel 40-48 and the cultic background of Ezek 43:1-12 has regularly obscured the political character of Yhwh's return to the temple.³⁰ But to miss the civic implications of Yhwh's royal appearance is to miss a major facet of the scene, and, for that matter, of the entire book of Ezekiel. To be clear, Yhwh's political leadership is not the only component of Ezek 43:1-12, but it is the fundamental concern that subsumes all others. Thus, for example, Yhwh's presence with his people, a major motif throughout the book, is certainly key.³¹ But this climactic scene eliminates any abstract notion of Yhwh's presence by immediately and thoroughly qualifying it as royal, that is, as the presence of a king.

Admittedly, a first glance at v. 7a may actually strain against this reading. Yhwh's royalty seems secondary to the lead concern of the locale from which he will reign.

Son of man, the place of my throne	בן־אדם את־מקום כסאי
and the place of the soles of my feet	ואת־מקום כפות רגלי
where I will dwell	אשר אשכן־שם
in the midst of the Israelites forever.	בתוך בני־ישראל לעולם

³⁰ Neglect of the royal theme latent in v. 3 is surely one reason the royal declaration of v. 7 has been treated primarily for its cultic rather than political significance. Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 2.415-416), for example, examines numerous parallels to the temple as throne and footstool with virtually no notice of the royal import. And Rudnig explains away the royal declaration with a wave to a 'pre-exilic Jerusalem cult-tradition', *Heilig*, 39.

³¹ Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 150-156. Also Hals, who observes, 'it is simply unmistakable that all that is being affirmed is the "negative" point that Yahweh will never leave his people again', *Ezekiel*, 288.

Focusing on ‘the place’ comports with the extraordinary minutia of the temple tour in Ezekiel 40-42.³² And, although convoluted, the syntax even underscores the deity’s concern to own the remarkable building that the prophet has toured. The particle *אֵל* lacks a governing verb, suggesting that the word acts as a demonstrative pronoun³³ or that the original verb has disappeared.³⁴ While neither option enjoys a watertight case,³⁵ a firm decision hardly affects interpretation, since the focus remains on the repeated ‘place’.³⁶ Perusal of the literature on this section seems to confirm this perspective since most scholars emphasize the place to the neglect of the type of place that Yhwh will inhabit.³⁷

But this is surely a mistake. If the royal hints in the preceding verses were insufficient, here Yhwh twice characterizes the temple as a royal abode.³⁸ The qualification of the temple as ‘place of my throne’ and ‘place of

³² Cf. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 464.

³³ Gese, *Verwassungsentwurf*, 34. Cf. IBHS, 10.3b, 10.3.2d. Also Joüon-Muraoka, §125j in ironic contrast to Muraoka, *Emphatic Words*, 158, ‘...it never plays the role of emphasizing the following noun’.

³⁴ Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.575 and Allen, *Ezekiel*, 2.242 relying on Muraoka, *Emphatic Words*.

³⁵ Additional support for the first option may appear in Zech 7:7 and Hag 2:5 where the absence of a finite verb again precludes *אֵל* from marking a direct object, and, unlike Ezek 43:7, the context offers no possibility of a misdirected verb. *Pace* Muraoka, *Emphatic Words*, 157. Cf. H. W. Wolff, *Haggai: A Commentary* (trans. M. Kohl; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 71.

³⁶ Num 20:5 represents a similar doubling of ‘place’ that highlights the location, here the post-exodus wilderness that the Israelites call a ‘place of evil’ that is ‘not a place’ for agriculture.

³⁷ E.g., Wevers, who claims the double royal statement ‘betrays the solemnity’ of the occasion, *Ezekiel*, 312. And Allen, who emphasizes the repetition of the verb ‘to dwell’ in vv. 7b and 9, *Ezekiel*, 2.256.

³⁸ In contrast with Solomon’s temple where the temple is merely Yhwh’s dwelling. Cf. 2 Sam 7:2-7, 1 Kgs 5:2-5, and 8:12-19.

the soles of my feet' narrows Yhwh's interest in the temple to its suitability for a particular purpose.³⁹ And while he expands the purpose of the temple as 'where I will dwell', the order of the modifiers is significant. Prior to owning the temple as the place where he will dwell, Yhwh characterizes it as a royal place. Whereas the earlier divine visions portrayed Yhwh's throne as detached from the created order, here the word 'place' tethers it to earth.⁴⁰ The prophet envisions a terrestrial locale for the exercise of Yhwh's reign. Here Yhwh will right the wrongs that he has exposed and castigated throughout Ezekiel 1-39. From this location, he will display the universal dominance that the first vision established as integral to his kingship. And here he will remain inviolable yet united to the people whom he has pledged to rule forever.

The dual description of the temple as throne and footstool ('place of the soles of my feet') qualifies Yhwh's royal interests as decidedly focused on power. This tack expands the earlier intent to reign with force (e.g., 20:33-44).⁴¹ The precise phrase used here is unique, but elsewhere the location of a person's soles indicates their dominance, e.g., when Yhwh sketches the borders of the land that he will give to Israel, 'every place on which the sole of

³⁹ Cf. the common refrain (and its variations) of Deuteronomy, 'the place that Yhwh will choose' e.g., 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21. Also, Job 28:12, 20 where the place of interest is the 'place of understanding'.

⁴⁰ Earlier Ezekiel saw Yhwh's throne hovering above terra firma (1:26, 10:1). But now, with the throne grounded on earth, Ezekiel describes Yhwh as 'dwelling' (יָשָׁב) for the first time. The cultic pledge to place 'my sanctuary in their midst forevermore' (37:26, 28) thus finds its fulfilment in overtly political terms.

⁴¹ Yhwh's enthronement as the king over his people may appear to invalidate the promise to unify Israel under the Davidic *nāšî'*-king (37:15-28), but the *nāšî'*'s role later in the vision of 40-48 is not incommensurate with either development. See below, §3.3.1.

your foot steps' (Deut 11:23).⁴² In Isaiah 60 Yhwh does refer to 'the place of my feet', constructing a parallel with 'my sanctuary' (v. 13) that illuminates the declaration in Ezek 43:7.⁴³ Here he promises the dawn of prosperity upon Israel as a byproduct of his kingship, pledging further that all foreign political powers will become subjects of 'the City of Yhwh'.⁴⁴ So, to say that the temple of Ezekiel 40-42 is the location of Yhwh's footstool is to imply that Yhwh will command subservience from any potential rivals.⁴⁵

2.4 Divine-royal fusion

When the vision of Ezekiel 40-48 first opens, the prophet sees 'something like the shape of a city' (40:2). Upon closer inspection, he recognizes the city-semblance as the temple complex.⁴⁶ A city, of course, is the rightful domain of

⁴² Cf. Josh 1:3, 1 Kgs 5:3, Mal 4:3, and, although lacking the vocabulary under question here, Gen 12:4-9 where Abram symbolically treads the length of the land Yhwh has promised. Also, David's report of military success in 2 Sam 22:39, 'I put them under my feet'. Cf. Psa 47:3.

⁴³ 1 Chronicles 28:2 refers to the ark of the covenant with the synonymous 'footstool', and Psa 132:2 implies a connection. But, of course, Ezekiel 40-48 lacks the ark entirely. Cf. Joyce's excellent observations on the confluence of ideas in Ezek 43:7 and the 'arkless' vision of restoration in Jer 3:15-18, *Ezekiel*, 227-228. Cf. P. Joyce, 'Temple and Worship in Ezekiel 40-48', in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. J. Day; LHBOTS 422; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 150-152. The article will be cited only when divergent from the commentary.

⁴⁴ R.L. Schulz hails Isaiah 60 as opening the 'highest concentration of nations terminology' in all of Isaiah, though his focus does not include the political ramifications of the terms in conjunction with Yhwh's kingship, 'Nationalism and Universalism in Isaiah', in *Interpreting Isaiah* (ed. H.G.M. Williamson and D. Firth; Leicester: Apollos, 2009), 141. In the same volume (pp. 84-103), D.J. Reimer opens a path for exploring these issues in his article 'Isaiah and Politics'.

⁴⁵ A. Salvesen, 'מַלְכוּת' in *Semantics of Ancient Hebrew*, 41-42, noting also the similar expressions in e.g., Isa 66:1, Nah 1:3, 3:5; and Zech 14:4.

⁴⁶ Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.514; Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 298.

the political leader, while the temple belongs to the deity.⁴⁷ Marc Van de Mieroop notes that in ancient Mesopotamia '[a] religious institution—such as a temple in the countryside—can be an ideological centre, but does not constitute a city'.⁴⁸

Ezekiel's vision begs to differ, however.⁴⁹ The chief denizen of the temple (Yhwh) induces the unexpected fusion of divine and political in order to show himself as the uncontested leader of both realms.⁵⁰ He is both king and god. Sketches of this unity have appeared earlier, first as the glimmering king upon the chariot engaging preparing rebels (Ezekiel 1-5), then in battles against treasonous subjects (Ezekiel 8-11, 20) as well as in depictions of beneficence and protection (Ezekiel 34). But Ezek 43:7 presents the boldest and clearest depiction of Israel's god functioning as her king, due in part to the vision's opening verses that identify the temple as a political structure, a city. The divine and political have fully fused.⁵¹

⁴⁷ G. Buccellati, 'Enthronement of the King and the Capital City in Texts from Ancient Mesopotamia and Syria', in *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim, June 7, 1964* (ed. R.D. Biggs and J.A. Brinkman; FWCAD 1; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1964), 54-61.

⁴⁸ M. Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 11.

⁴⁹ Joyce (*Ezekiel*, 222) identifies the city structure as the city *Yhwh Shammah* that appears later in the vision, but the syntax of 40:1-5 requires seeing the city as the temple. See §5.4 below.

⁵⁰ Cf. Psa 48:2 'Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great king'. J.P. Brown contends that in the ancient world the city-king nexus arose because the gods, themselves viewed as kings, dwelled in cities, 'From Divine Kingship to Dispersal of Power in the Mediterranean City-State', *ZAW* 105 (1993): 70. But this perspective on kingship begs the question of how a divine institution, named by humans, came to acquire a human designation, a matter that deserves more space than currently available.

⁵¹ Anticipating discussion below (§5.4), this fusion signals something of the idealism that Ezekiel envisions for Israel's future. Cf. M. Weinfeld, 'Zion and Jerusalem as Religious and Political Capital: Ideology and Utopia', in *The Prophet and the Historian: Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical Criticism* (ed. R.E. Friedman; HSS 26; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1983), 75-115.

The prophet confirms his equivocation of the temple's identity by referring to its wall and gates. The Hebrew חומה refers to a city wall (40:5, 42:20), and is wholly absent from the narrative of Solomon's temple. Ezekiel, of course, knows terms for smaller walls, as in 41:2 (קיר) and 42:7 (גדר), suggesting a deliberate use of חומה to mark the temple complex as a political centre.⁵² Suggestively, the previous instance referred to the cataclysmic result of Yhwh's battle with Gog, '...the cliffs shall fall and every wall (חומה) shall fall to the ground'. Now, reading with the literary trajectory of the MT, only one wall remains, a testimony to its owner's power. Although many scholars have already observed the double duty of the gates and walls, the implications for Yhwh's kingship remain untouched.⁵³

Long before and long after Ezekiel's day, the city wall was a 'synecdoche for the city' itself.⁵⁴ And the city, in turn, spoke to the power of the king.⁵⁵ The wall, then, was a précis of the king's power and thus no mundane feature.⁵⁶ Granted, in comparison to other ancient cities, the wall of

⁵² Of numerous examples, Josh 2:15 informing that Rahab lived in Jericho's wall (חומה) and Lev 25:29-31 with jubilee laws for those in walled cities (בין חומה) and settlements without walls (חמה). Also, Ezek 26:4, 9, 10, 27:11, 38:11, 38:20.

⁵³ Already in 1895 J. Skinner saw the gates as like those of 'a fortified town', *Ezekiel*, 407. More recently, Stevenson, *Vision*, 44-45, drawing on Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.352-353.

⁵⁴ L. Ristvet, 'The Third Millennium Wall at Tell Leilan, Syria: Identity, Authority and Urbanism', in *Power and Architecture: Monumental Public Architecture in the Bronze Age Near East and Aegean* (ed. J. Bretschneider, J. Driessen, and K. van Lerberghe; OLA 156; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 184.

⁵⁵ Exhaustively, M. Novák, *Herrschaftsform und Stadtbaukunst Programmatik im mesopotamischen Residenzstadtbau von Agade bis Surra man ra' ā* (SVA 7; Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 1999).

⁵⁶ Cf. Van de Mieroop, *City*, 73.

Chapter 7—The Fullness of Kingship

Ezekiel's temple-city is unimpressive; by some calculations, a Mesopotamian city wall could range from 25-70 feet tall.⁵⁷ Here the wall is only about ten feet tall. Still, no other structure in the temple of Ezekiel 40-42 surpasses this height, suggesting that the affective power of the wall derives from its contrast to other structures. Similarly, at ten feet, the wall is unique in its thickness. Yhwh's royal temple-city thus boasts a remarkable outer defense.

More impressive still are the temple-city gates, the only entrances to the royal domain. Several scholars have compared the gates to the city gates excavated at the northern Israelite cities Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer, since each boasts the six chambers.⁵⁸ But such comparison has derived largely out of an apology for substantiating the claim that Solomon built these cities (1 Kgs 9:15).⁵⁹ The more relevant and less contentious comparison concerns the defensive function of these gates, as indicated by their imposing size.⁶⁰ The narrowed windows of Ezekiel's temple strengthen this case. The development of the city gate at Ashdod may also be illustrative; prior to the late eleventh

⁵⁷ W.J. Hamblin, *Warfare in the Ancient Near East to 1600 BC: Holy Warriors at the Dawn of History* (London: Routledge, 2006), 215-236.

⁵⁸ E.g. C.G. Howie, 'The East Gate of Ezekiel's Temple Enclosure and the Solomonic Gateway of Megiddo', *BASOR* 117 (1950): 13-19. And, cautiously, Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.352-360.

⁵⁹ Debate continues to swirl around Albright's hypothesis. For full bibliography, W.G. Dever 'Archaeology and the "Age of Solomon": A Case Study in Archaeology and Historiography', in *The Age of Solomon: Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium* (ed. L.K. Handy; SHCANE 11; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 232-235.

⁶⁰ Y. Yadin, 'Solomon's City Wall and Gate at Gezer', *IEJ* 8 (1950): 86.

or early tenth century, Ashdod lacked a city gate whereas, the construction of a fortified gate correlates with increased attacks from Ashdod's neighbours.⁶¹

Yhwh's original temple (1 Kgs 6-8) lacked the massive gates of Ezekiel's visional temple. But, as earlier chapters in Ezekiel detail, Yhwh's enemies breached his domain, necessitating strategic developments.⁶² What Ezekiel 40-42 presents, however, goes beyond fortification for a temple, a surprise if Yhwh is merely Israel's god. But, with divine and royal fused, a fortified city is wholly suitable because Yhwh is also Israel's king.

3. Kingship and power structures

With 43:7, Yhwh's earlier promise to reign (20:33) now takes effect. He quickly exerts his royal power by engaging the power structures in Israel, reminding them of the king's authority. Within the accession speech itself, Yhwh establishes his superiority to past monarchs. Later in the vision, he establishes how Israel's leaders will respond to his rule.

3.1 Royal cult

Yhwh's first royal decree concerns the behaviour of his subjects: 'the Israelites shall never again defile my holy name...'. Yhwh denotes their unfaithfulness using the generic terms 'abominations' and 'whorings', evoking the rebellions described in Ezekiel 8 (the four scenes of abominations) and in Ezekiel 20 (the whoring after other deities). He also introduces a new problem that dovetails with his enthronement and sole exercise of power: a royal cult.

⁶¹ C.S. Ehrlich, "How the Mighty are Fallen": The Philistines in Their Tenth Century Context', in *The Age of Solomon*, 197. D. Ussishkin notes that the four-chambered gate was eventually expanded to six chambers, presumably to meet greater need for security, 'The "Solomonic" City Gate at Megiddo', *BASOR* 239 (1980): 1-18.

⁶² Anticipating §3.3.2 below, cf. D.C. Olson, 'What Got the Gatekeepers into Trouble?', *JSOT* 30 (2005): 223-242.

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Indication of Yhwh's concern with a royal cult hinges on the difficult phrase in vv. 7b and 9, 'the corpses of their kings at their deaths'.⁶³ Some scholars think that Yhwh claims defilement by royal burial grounds in the temple complex.⁶⁴ However, the Hebrew Bible produces little compelling support for this reading, not least because Ahaz and his forebears were buried in the location known as the 'city of David' (2 Kgs 16:20).⁶⁵ For that matter, the passage itself is no help, as Yhwh patently does not state a concern about the temple complex but about how Israel treated her kings.⁶⁶ And, further, Yhwh himself (i.e., his name) has been defiled, not his temple. As Elizabeth Bloch-Smith puts it, '[b]urial practices reveal more about the living than the dead'.⁶⁷ So, concern with burial custom suggests that in some way the practice honoured Israel's kings above Yhwh.

The semantics of the word 'corpse' support this possibility. Although the common sense of 'corpse' as 'dead human' denotes the victims of Yhwh's fury (Ezek 6:5), elsewhere the word refers to Israel's idolatrous figurines (Lev

⁶³ MT מְנוּחָם ('their high places') is questionable and may be repointed to מְנוּחָם ('at their deaths'). Cooke notes that twenty manuscripts also support this change, *Ezekiel*, 474.

⁶⁴ E.g. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 312. K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986), 250. Cf. Lev 21:11.

⁶⁵ The Garden of Uzza, the burial location of Manasseh and Amon (2 Kgs 21:18, 26) has attracted speculation as a temple site. But, in spite of proximity between temple and palace, only interpretive gymnastics can put the garden in the temple complex, F. Stavrakopoulou, 'Exploring the Garden of Uzza: Death, Burial and Ideologies of Kingship', *Bib* 87 (2006): 1–21.

⁶⁶ Pace Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.417 and Stevenson, *Vision*, 110 who see the context as demanding a concern with the temple. The programmatic power of 43:1–12, however, indicates that the temple is merely part of the larger concern with Yhwh's kingship.

⁶⁷ E. Bloch-Smith, 'Life in Judah from the Perspective of the Dead', *NEA* 65 (2002): 121.

26:30).⁶⁸ On this account, the Hebrew פֶּגֶר might be better rendered as ‘monument’ than ‘corpse’, so that the offense is the creation of memorial statues that usurped Yhwh’s place as Israel’s god.⁶⁹ Yhwh has already signalled his interest in the activity of the royal house, and seeing ‘the corpses of their kings’ as reflective of a royal cult only intensifies Yhwh’s claim to power.⁷⁰ Still, whatever the precise referent of ‘the corpses of their kings at their deaths’, the problem lies not only in worshipping an entity other than Yhwh but in devoting that homage to the monarchs of Israel.⁷¹

Further, in naming both the Israelites and ‘their kings’ as the perpetrators, Yhwh isolates Israel’s monarchs as the particular targets of his speech.⁷² With no mention of cult officials or lay leaders this selectivity comports with the context of Yhwh’s own royalty.⁷³ Perhaps the kings promoted the veneration that they eventually received or perhaps Yhwh addresses the kings because they were figureheads for the whole of Israel.

⁶⁸ Lyons demonstrates that Ezek 6:5 has reworked Lev 26:30, adding further support to seeing Ezek 43:7 referring to monuments not corpses, *Law to Prophecy*, 63.

⁶⁹ Proposed by D. Neiman, ‘PGR: a Canaanite Cult-object in the Old Testament’, *JBL* 67 (1948): 55-60, accepted by Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.417 and developed by Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.584-85.

⁷⁰ M. Odell nestles this verse in the larger critique of Judah’s cultic practices by reading the phrase פֶּגֶר מִלִּכְהֵם as designating *molek* offerings unrelated to kings, ‘Image of Jealousy’, 138-140. Cf. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 150-51. But this unnecessarily disregards the implicit testimony of LXX pointing to the case developed here. Cf. Lust, ‘Exegesis in LXX Ezekiel’, 216-217.

⁷¹ F. Stavrakopoulou correlates this to territorial claims, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (LHBOTS 473; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 117-120.

⁷² Pace Block who sees the repetition of ‘whorings’ and ‘Israelites’ (vv. 7b-9) as focusing on the people, *Ezekiel*, 2.582. If Israel’s unfaithfulness concerns her failure to revere Yhwh as king (as above), then the focus falls instead on the kings and tightens the thematic unity of the pericope.

⁷³ Recognizing this emphasis mitigates Tuell’s (*Ezekiel*, 295) concern to date this verse to a time when Israel needed to ‘downplay...past imperial aspirations’.

Speculation is unnecessary, though, since the context of Yhwh's royal speech adequately explains the naming of the kings. In establishing himself as the king of Israel, Yhwh elevates himself above previous kings in order to confirm that he alone is worthy of the office.⁷⁴

In stating 'never again', Yhwh ensures the holiness of his name but also the sanctity of his rule, the underlying concern. Now the power and scope that marked the universal, cosmic kingship of Ezekiel 1 transfers completely to the kingship he will exercise over Israel in her land. The immensity of his reign thus excludes the possibility that human kings could again receive the loyalty (worship) that belongs to Yhwh alone. So, in one stroke Yhwh denounces the practice of revering previous monarchs as well as the people who supported this practice, particularly the living kings themselves. The effect is a self-designation of superiority, a point underscored by linking his presence to the kings' absence (v. 9).

3.2 Royal hubris

In addition to the royal cult, Yhwh specifies another practice that defiled his holy name: 'putting their threshold against my threshold and their doorposts against my doorposts and [only] a wall between me and them' (v. 8). Most scholars who address this issue assume that the offense concerns the location of the palace complex.⁷⁵ Block rightly notes, though, that nowhere else does the proximity of palace and temple receive explicit critique.⁷⁶ Yet neither does the absence of explicit critique entail approval.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Though not articulating the precise concerns of the current argument, Stavrakopoulou recently surveys the role of the royal cult in Israelite kingship ideology, *Land of Our Fathers*, 113-120.

⁷⁵ E.g., Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.416; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 464-465. Gese, Eichrodt and Rudnig ('Ezechiël') ignore it.

⁷⁶ Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.585-586.

Chapter 7—The Fullness of Kingship

A brief look at the account of the construction narratives of 1 Kings shows numerous subtle snipes at Solomon.⁷⁸ The first account of the temple construction concludes by noting that Solomon devoted seven years to building the temple (6:38). But Solomon spent thirteen years on his own house (7:1). The time discrepancy points to Solomon's priorities. The text highlights this all the more by inverting the common verb-object word order, beginning 7:1 with 'But his own house...'.⁷⁹

Further still, the palace account in 7:1-12 bifurcates the temple construction account, falling between the building narrative (6:1-36) and the furnishings story (7:13-50). This arrangement gives precedence to the completion of Solomon's house, rather than Yhwh's, which is not completed until the furnishings have been made (7:51). The dimensions and complexities of Yhwh's house also pale in comparison to Solomon's. For example, Yhwh's house is one building sixty cubits long (6:2) but Solomon's comprises five, including at least one that was one hundred cubits long (7:2).⁸⁰

The salient point even from this brief investigation of 1 Kings 6-7 is that Solomon built himself a house still greater than the 'exalted house' (8:13) that he built for Yhwh. The proximity of Solomon's house to Yhwh's demeaned

⁷⁷ One obvious explanation is that such an arrangement was commonplace in the ancient world. Cf. V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings* (JSOTSup 115; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992).

⁷⁸ Cf. E.A. Seibert, who notes other examples, but, incidentally, none from 1 Kings 7, *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonian Narrative: A Rereading of 1 Kings 1-11* (LHBOTS 436; New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

⁷⁹ As suggested by J.A. Bimson, '1 and 2 Kings', in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (ed. G.J. Wenham et al.; Nottingham: IVP, 1994), 345.

⁸⁰ Cf. A.G. Auld, *Kings* (DSB; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1986), 80.

the deity's temple and demonstrated the human king's hubris.⁸¹ The weight of Yhwh's critique in Ezek 43:8 thus lands on the monarchy for perpetuating a system that challenged Yhwh's kingship and defiled his 'holy name' by denigrating his authority. The proximity of palace and temple is symptomatic of Israel's regard for Yhwh's kingship. However, the new regime of Yhwh's rule eliminates this problem because temple and palace are united under the banner of a single king, Yhwh himself.⁸²

3.3 Leaders in Yhwh's economy

As the king, Yhwh restructures Israelite society to meet his agenda. Already §§3.1-2 have noted how he plans in Ezekiel 43 to secure power and loyalty from his subjects over and against previous monarchs. But this demonstration of authority is hardly limited to the accession speech. The remainder of the vision continues to position Yhwh as the supreme ruler of the restored Israel by detailing how Yhwh's rule affects human powers.

3.3.1 The *nāšî'*

Most noticeably, Yhwh's kingship bears on the *nāšî'*.⁸³ Aside from the triple reference to the 'kings' of Israel in 43:7b-9, Ezekiel 40-48 omits the word

⁸¹ P.S.F. Van Keulen detects this in the transposition of MT 1 Kgs 7:1-12 to LXX 7:38-50 that allows Solomon to complete the temple before building his own house, *Two Versions of the Solomon Narrative: An Inquiry into the Relationship between MT 1 Kgs. 2-11 and LXX 3 Reg. 2-11* (VTSup 104; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 131.

⁸² In this respect, Stevenson (*Vision*, 117) is correct to see the *binyan* structure (41:12) at the west end of the temple complex as precluding the human palace, though perhaps she overstates the role of territory since Ezek 43:1-12 (and the whole of Ezekiel 40-48) only address territorial concerns as they pertain to Yhwh's kingship.

⁸³ As seen below, a full investigation of the term's etymological and literary origins is unnecessary since Ezekiel's own use of the term provides sufficient evidence for constructing its semantic connotations. Still the classic essay of E.A. Speiser is valuable for these matters, 'Background and Function of the Biblical *nāšî'*', *CBQ* 25 (1963): 111-117.

‘king’.⁸⁴ As observed in Chapter 6, §4.2-4.5, controversy swirls around the *nāšî’* and Ezekiel’s view of the monarchy.⁸⁵ The *nāšî’* must be a royal figure, a king, in view of 43:7 ‘they and their kings...shall not again profane’; Ezekiel envisions a future with a monarchy.⁸⁶ But most agree that the title *nāšî’* represents a demotion of the human royal institution.⁸⁷

Ezekiel’s persistent excoriation of royal figures and the muted duties of the *nāšî’* seem to confirm a degradation of monarchy into an apolitical, impotent position of subservience to Yhwh. Thus, to eat bread before Yhwh, the *nāšî’* must sit in the east gate of the temple complex (44:3). Since royalty in the ancient world typically sponsored the deity’s cult, some scholars view the location of this fellowship meal as a tacit critique of Israel’s monarchy.⁸⁸ The reasonable assumption is that Israel’s king ordinarily enjoyed a greater level of intimacy with Yhwh that is now eliminated.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Tuell too easily dispenses with the complexity of this dynamic by attributing these verses to his Persian-period redactor, *Law*, 41-42.

⁸⁵ See especially the judicious study of Duguid, *Leaders of Israel*, 11-33. Among others, Rudnig, *Heilig*, 137-164 and S. Hwang, ‘*נָשִׂי* in Ezekiel 40-48’, *SJOT* 23 (2009): 183-194.

⁸⁶ Duguid, *Leaders of Israel*, 25, 26 n. 99. Cf. Rudnig who perhaps claims too much, ‘in Ezekiel *nāšî’* is the normal title for the king of Judah’, *Heilig*, 156.

⁸⁷ E.g., Levenson, *Theology*, 57ff., Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 231.

⁸⁸ Stevenson, *Vision*, 122. Gese, sees negative appraisal only in 45:8b-9, 46:16-18, *Verfassungsentwurf*, 85-86. Cf. Rudnig, *Heilig*, 161.

⁸⁹ Cooke assumes such, *Ezekiel*, 478. Nevader (‘Exile and Institution’, 116-130) develops the strongest case by arguing that the *nāšî’* has been stripped of judicial function, land privilege, cultic function and temple access, in other words, common rights of kings.

But the cultic role of the king in the Hebrew Bible is notoriously complex and begs for cautious judgment.⁹⁰ Relevant texts describe the king's religious sponsorship and active participation in cultic practice but also condemn him for involving himself too closely.⁹¹ Perhaps, then, the critique is not so strong as some might suppose. For, even at some remove from the altar, the *nāšî'* still gains access to Yhwh's domain, a signal of Yhwh's approval. Here the *nāšî'* receives unique access to Yhwh while his countrymen look on (46:1-8). Though not designated 'holy', the east gate was hallowed because Yhwh's glory entered by this route, and access to the deity-king's space speaks to Yhwh's esteem for the *nāšî'*.⁹² Further, by sitting in the east gate, the *nāšî'* acts as a guard to Yhwh's sacred route, intimating Yhwh's trust of the *nāšî'*.⁹³

The *nāšî'*'s duties and privileges identify his unique connection with Yhwh. While not directing matters of state, the *nāšî'* still leads the people; his role within Yhwh's kingdom is pivotal. As he facilitates the people's

⁹⁰ As recognized by D. W. Rooke, 'Kingship as Priesthood', in *King and Messiah*, 187-208.

⁹¹ For references, L. L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1995), 20-29. Grabbe concludes that since only Uzziah is condemned outright (2 Chr 26:20), the king played a major role in the cult. But a nuanced look at the king's role allows that Uzziah's misdeed was a unique overextension of privilege, a dynamic perhaps also at play in the account of Ahaz's commandeering of the altar (2 Kgs 16:10-16). Moreover, Josiah, the model of uprightness, did not attempt to sacrifice, in spite of overseeing the Passover (2 Chr 35:1-19). Cf. A. Cody, *A History of the Old Testament Priesthood* (AnBib 35; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 98-107.

⁹² In this respect, the *nāšî'* resembles David (2 Sam 7:18//2 Chr 17:16) and Hezekiah (2 Kgs 19:14//Isa 37:14), the only two kings of Judah portrayed as freely coming 'before Yhwh'.

⁹³ J. W. Wright, 'A Tale of Three Cities: Urban Gates, Squares and Power in Iron Age II, Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Judah', in *Second Temple Studies III: Studies in Politics, Class, and Material Culture* (ed. P. R. Davies and J. M. Halligan; JSOTSup 340; London: Continuum, 2002), 37.

encounters with Yhwh, the *nāšî'*'s duties position him between the people and Yhwh. Contrasted with Israel's previous royal figures, the *nāšî'* appears to exist solely as a servant. He supplies animals and grain for the regular offerings to Yhwh (45:17, 22-25; 46:2-8, 12). He initiates both the celebrations before Yhwh and the expiations.⁹⁴ Were the *nāšî'* to neglect his duties, the restored society would fail, not least because he is responsible for the atonement offerings that prevent the accumulation of defilement.⁹⁵ Yhwh's successful reign requires the faithfulness of the *nāšî'*. The *nāšî'* must ensure harmony between Yhwh and his people in order to secure the longevity of Yhwh's rule.

But, of course, Yhwh has already pronounced an end to the defilement (43:7). And, in the oracle against the shepherds of Israel, Yhwh vowed that 'never again' would the sheep be scattered (34:28). The paradox between divine and human responsibility thus reappears. Strikingly, then, while the locus of power in Ezekiel 40-48 centres on Yhwh himself, the dynamics of his reign allow for a degree of power-sharing. Yhwh invests the *nāšî'* with power to sustain the holiness of the restored nation.

In compensation for his duties the *nāšî'* receives the honour of intimacy with Yhwh, as seen in the eating of bread in Yhwh's presence. What is more,

⁹⁴ Haran notes the discrepancies between the *nāšî'*'s duties and prescriptions for offerings in P, 'Law', 62. But he neglects to mention that P does not direct the king to perform these offerings; yet another indication that Ezekiel's *nāšî'* is not merely a polemic against monarchy but a radical revision of Israel.

⁹⁵ A full treatment of atonement is J. Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (HBM 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005). Whether the atoning function of the *nāšî'*'s peace offering (45:17) borrows (Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 2.1475-78) or develops (Sklar, *Sin*, 178, n.63), Lev 17:10-12 is immaterial for appreciating that his role is unique compared to the people's.

no other individual receives land paralleling the large swath devoted to Yhwh himself (45:6, 48:21-22). In one sense, of course, this disbursement reflects the resolution of Yhwh's accession speech (43:8) that Yhwh's royal space would remain unmingled with the space of his human counterpart.⁹⁶ Since Yhwh, not the human king, disburses the land, there may also be a subtle disparagement of Israel's monarchy.⁹⁷ But, like access to the east gate, both the location and size of the *nāšî'*'s territory signal Yhwh's favourable disposition toward the *nāšî'*.

In length, the land nearly equals the disbursements of the twelve tribes, and its borders abut Yhwh's as well as the land of Judah to the north and Benjamin to the south (48:22). Within the larger memory of the Hebrew Bible, this arrangement breathes significance since Judah and Benjamin were the favoured tribes of the twelve, not least for fathering royalty.⁹⁸ While nowhere specified, the juxtaposition of territory belonging to Judah and the *nāšî'* hints further that the *nāšî'* is a genuinely royal figure with distinct privileges in Yhwh's economy. His proximity to Yhwh speaks to his centrality in the restored nation, but the distance between his land and Yhwh's royal dwelling remind that Yhwh, not the *nāšî'*, directs the nation's well-being. Yhwh, not the *nāšî'*, is the king.

In several ways the *nāšî'* of Ezekiel 40-48 evokes the Davidic figure of Ezekiel 34 and 37. The title '*nāšî'*' is notable in itself, but even more noteworthy is the subtlety of the reference to the *nāšî'* in 44:3. Here Yhwh

⁹⁶ As many have noted, e.g., E.G. King, 'The Prince in Ezekiel', *TOTS* 5 (1885): 116.

⁹⁷ Stevenson, *Vision*, 140.

⁹⁸ H. Brodsky, 'The Utopian Map in Ezekiel (48:1-35)', *JBQ* 34 (2006): 23.

mentions ‘the *nāšî*’ (44:3). Earlier the Davidic figure was promised to be ‘a *nāšî*’ over Israel (34:24, 37:25). Here the definite article assumes a concrete referent. And, with no other mention of a *nāšî*’ since Ezek 37:25, the Davidic *nāšî*’-king is a likely candidate.

The duties of the *nāšî*’ in 40-48 also correspond to the promises associated with the Davidic *nāšî*’.⁹⁹ The David figure is the pivot on which the relationship between Yhwh and his people hinges. He will tend the sheep that previous royal figures scattered (34:23-24) and oversee the health of a united nation (37:22-25). Admittedly, the descriptions in 34 and 37 smacked of more blatantly political activities, perhaps of ruling and leading rather than the service that dominates the *nāšî*’s duties in 40-48.¹⁰⁰ But, expecting a full disclosure earlier in the book is exacting and unwarranted. Yhwh’s pledge to reign over his people (20:33) hardly foretold the developments of kingship discovered in 40-48. Similarly, earlier intimations about the *nāšî*’ need not present the details laid out in 40-48.

Further, in the final vision, the *nāšî*’ maintains a full presence before the people as leader.¹⁰¹ As the overseer of justice and righteousness, the *nāšî*’ extends his oversight beyond the cultic duties to more mundane matters of ensuring the quality of quotidian behaviour among Yhwh’s people (45:9-10).¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Block, ‘David’, 186-188.

¹⁰⁰ Thus, in view of the narrowly-defined role of the *nāšî*’, Zimmerli rejects a link, ‘Planungen für den Wiederaufbau nach der Katastrophe von 587’, VT 18 (1968), 245.

¹⁰¹ Hwang, ‘נָשִׂי in Ezekiel 40-48’, 190.

¹⁰² Odell (*Ezekiel*, 512-13) argues that the plural forms in 45:9-10 indicate that the *nāšî*’ is not in view but that here Yhwh critiques the elite of Israel who are in Babylon. Still, by implication, the *nāšî*’ must reject the injustices perpetrated by Israel’s former leaders, and his public office suggests his responsibility.

Chapter 7—The Fullness of Kingship

The *nāšî'* is responsible for honest trade and peace between the ruling and lower classes. Similarly, by dealing fairly with his subjects, the *nāšî'* himself exemplifies the behaviour that should mark the whole of society (46:17-18). Another connection between the respective portrayals of the *nāšî'* is the intimacy both will experience with Yhwh. The Davidic figure, of course, owes his existence to Yhwh and acts as an extension of Yhwh. The *nāšî'* of 40-48 mediates Yhwh to the people by providing the priests with sacrifices and offerings and by sitting in Yhwh's presence. While the priests and the people of the land serve in Yhwh's presence, only the *nāšî'* receives the honour of sitting before Yhwh.

Given the vision's climax in 43:7, Ezekiel 40-48 seems oriented towards an ordering of the new society in which Yhwh is the king. The burden of the vision is to demonstrate the character of Yhwh's kingship. If a polemic must be discovered in the material regarding the *nāšî'*, a nuanced view recognizes a critique aimed at monarchic abuses, not at the institution. After all, Yhwh's own kingship in restored Israel partly depends on the success of human kingship. Perhaps, then, the title '*nāšî'*' is less a critique of the monarchy than a reflection of the larger political scenario in which he appears, namely, the reign of Yhwh as king (cf. Ezek 34:23-24, 37:22-24).

In Ezekiel 40-48 the kingship of Yhwh is understated on account of the sole (overt) reference in 43:7. However, on closer inspection, the whole of this final vision resonates with the royal presence. For a newly enthroned king, the societal power structures are key to the success and longevity of his reign. And Yhwh, with perfect political acumen, enlists the highest-ranking human figure as the engine of his reign. While Yhwh is king, his deputy features

prominently, even to the point of ensuring the success of the restoration that Yhwh promises. But, importantly, the *nāšî'* is not Yhwh's vicegerent; he does not exercise authority on Yhwh's behalf.¹⁰³ Yhwh alone is the supreme ruler, and he orders the *nāšî'*'s role as a guarantor of his own supremacy.

3.3.2 Priests

In the book of Ezekiel, Yhwh's kingship blurs distinctions between the political and the cultic. Unsurprisingly, then, the force of Yhwh's kingship also affects the priests. The priests, like the *nāšî'*, are agents for preserving Yhwh's rule. So, although lacking the title and honours of the *nāšî'*, the priests are nonetheless political figures whose behaviour the king must regulate in order to ensure the success of his society.¹⁰⁴

Like any wise king, then, Yhwh chooses faithful priests, those who will further the success of his reign. In Ezekiel 40-48 these are the Zadokites whom Yhwh tasks to serve him most intimately (40:44-46; 44:15-31) by performing the most sacred of temple duties. Their place in the history of Yahwism has long vexed scholars, leading to a rich and divided specialist literature.¹⁰⁵ But only a sampling of the contested issues will feature here since the present interest is how the text of Ezekiel portrays Yhwh's kingship in relation to the priests. So it is immaterial for now whether Ezekiel was himself a Zadokite¹⁰⁶ or whether support for Zadokites derives from an

¹⁰³ Pace Joyce, 'King and Messiah', 336.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Stevenson, *Vision*, 77.

¹⁰⁵ A. Hunt, *Missing Priests: The Zadokites in Tradition and History* (LHBOTS 452; New York: T&T Clark, 2006). R. Abba, 'Priests and Levites in Ezekiel', *VT* 28 (1978): 1-9.

¹⁰⁶ B.J. Schwartz, 'A Priest Out of Place: Reconsidering Ezekiel's Role in the History of the Israelite Priesthood', in *EHW*, 61-72.

ancient priestly rivalry.¹⁰⁷ Iain Duguid may be correct to deny Ezekiel as a propagandist for the Zadokites, but Ezekiel is eminently guilty of propaganda—for Yhwh.¹⁰⁸

Whatever ulterior motives scholars may discover, Ezekiel's inclusion of the Zadokites functions as a showcase of Yhwh's kingship. On account of their faithfulness to Yhwh, these priests, and not the larger contingent of Levites, receive access to Yhwh's inner proximity, both in their work (44:15-31) and in their land (45:3-4, 48:11-12).¹⁰⁹ They, more than the Levites, have kept the law of holiness, demonstrating their fealty to the king who promulgated the law.¹¹⁰ Put differently, the Zadokites earned their rank by proving themselves faithful to the rule of the king, which Yhwh affirms, 'they did not stray when the Israelites strayed like the Levites strayed' (48:11, cf. 44:15).¹¹¹ For their fealty, Yhwh rewards the Zadokites by granting them land nearest the temple.¹¹² He also charges them to lead the people in pursuing further

¹⁰⁷ S.L. Cook, 'Innerbiblical Interpretation in Ezekiel 44 and the History of Israel's Priesthood', *JBL* 114 (1995): 197-208.

¹⁰⁸ I.M. Duguid, 'Putting Priests in Their Place: Ezekiel's Contribution to the History of the Old Testament Priesthood', in *EHW*, 43-60.

¹⁰⁹ Duguid helpfully notes that Yhwh judges all priests (22:26), suggesting that the Zadokites' faithfulness is comparative, *Leaders of Israel*, 80-83.

¹¹⁰ On law, see below §§.2-5.3.

¹¹¹ The generic term 'stray' shows that specific transgressions are unimportant. Cf. Ezek 14:11.

¹¹² M. Weinfeld first proposed that the Zadokites' reward aligned with the phenomenon of ANE kings honouring covenant fealty, 'The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East', *JAOS* 90 (1970): 184-203. Levenson (*Theology*, 145), Duguid (*Leaders of Israel*, 82) and Block (*Ezekiel*, 2.636) note Weinfeld but curiously overlook that Yhwh, like the ANE grantors, is a royal figure and thus Yhwh's instructions regarding the Zadokites exemplify a king's interaction with his subjects.

faithfulness to the king: ‘They shall show my people the difference between holy and common, and they shall teach them the difference between impure and clean’ (44:23).¹¹³

In spite of their comparative failure, the Levites remain Yhwh’s servants. Whether their role in Yhwh’s kingdom is an honour or demotion, per the notorious controversy begun by Wellhausen, is peripheral here.¹¹⁴ What does matter is the exertion of Yhwh’s power: dictating the scope of intimacy the Levites will receive in comparison to the Zadokites. They serve ‘the people’ (44:11, cf. 45:5) but the Zadokites serve Yhwh and ‘come near’ to do so (44:15-16). Also important is the irony of the Levites’ assignment.¹¹⁵ Yhwh recounts that they ‘went far from (קרח) him (44:10) by devoting themselves to other deities.’¹¹⁶ But now Yhwh conscripts them to guard his holiness that was breached when unlicensed interlopers dragged unclean elements into the holy place (44:6-9).

The salient point about the Levites in relation to Yhwh’s kingship is that they shall prevent all unworthies from entering the temple complex, even those whom they themselves once were. This is neither a polemic against

¹¹³ A nearly verbatim reversal of the critique in 22:26.

¹¹⁴ In addition to sources already noted, F. Fechter, ‘Priesthood in Exile according to the Book of Ezekiel’, in *EHW*, 27-41 and J.G. McConville, ‘Priests and Levites in Ezekiel: A Crux in the Interpretation of Israel’s History’, *TynB* 34 (1983): 3-31.

¹¹⁵ Here diverging from Stevenson who sketches the main features of the argument but understates the Levites’ guilt, *Vision*, 66-78.

¹¹⁶ Here evoking the temple abominations—e.g., worship of the sun—that were ‘driving the Israelites far (קרח) from’ Yhwh (8:6).

non-Israelites nor a veiled repudiation of the Levites themselves,¹¹⁷ but an affirmation of that common trope in the Hebrew Bible: only the blameless shall see Yhwh.¹¹⁸ By maintaining this truism, the Levites safeguard the law of the temple—utter holiness all around (43:12)—and demonstrate their own loyalty to the king.

What is more, the Levites' loyalty secures Yhwh's kingship, precisely the duty of priests in relation to the king. Priests were integral to the power grid because they brokered the relationship between the divine and the human, and the palace and temple were mutually influential, with the king selecting priests and the priests advising the king.¹¹⁹ So, in choosing the Zadokites over the other Levites, Yhwh displays the extent of his authority. Yet, of course, Yhwh is also god, and the priests broker his relationship with the people, not least by guarding his holiness. The Levites, after all, controlled access to Yhwh by guarding the defensive structures that were the temple gates (44:11).¹²⁰ Once more, then, Yhwh's kingship emerges as engaged in the public validation of authority, that is, politics. His identity as Israel's god does not prevent him from exercising a political kingship.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Pace S.S. Tuell, 'The Priesthood of the "Foreigner": Evidence of Competing Polities in Ezekiel 44:1-14 and Isaiah 56:1-8', in *Constituting the Community: Studies in the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honour of S. Dean McBride* (ed. J.T. Strong and S.S. Tuell; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 183-204.

¹¹⁸ Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 231.

¹¹⁹ Recently, M.B. Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth: Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle* (FAT II.50; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 119-172.

¹²⁰ Cf. Wright, 'Three Cities', 35.

¹²¹ More emphasis on this point, adumbrated but not developed, might have eased D.W. Rooke's good discussion of whether Ezekiel 40-48 posits a society ruled by priests, *Zadok's Heirs: The Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (OTM; Oxford: OUP, 2000), 104-119.

Like the accession speech of 43:7-12, the whole of 40-48 show Yhwh engaging the power structures of his kingdom. Both the overtly political (*nāšî*) and the overtly religious (priests) receive his attention.¹²² Ezekiel's royal portrait of Yhwh displays a largely consonant expectation that Israel's deity is also her king, and the final vision is no exception.

4. Kingship and territory

Another theme of Yhwh's accession speech is physical space. Having asserted his kingship and critiqued previous practices (43:7-9), Yhwh enlists the prophet to communicate his kingship to the people (v. 10). Yhwh's chief message concerns the temple described in Ezekiel 40-42. In itself, emphasis on the temple appears to confirm the priority of Yhwh's identity as the god of Israel in Ezekiel. However, within Yhwh's royal address, the prophet's duty to 'inform the Israelites about the temple' (v. 10) demands to be read as a command to explain the significance of royal space.¹²³ Since 43:1-12 is programmatic for the whole of Ezekiel 40-48, the interest in royal space extends beyond the temple to encompass all territory over which Yhwh will reign. The wall around the temple complex does not bracket Yhwh's authority from the remainder of Israel's land.

4.1 The temple

At the outset of the temple tour Ezekiel's guide urged him to pay attention so that he could 'inform the Israelites about all that you see' (40:4). Now Yhwh

¹²² C. Patton denies a political role for the priests in Ezekiel 40-48 in favour of seeing them as facilitators of worship that recognizes 'who God is', 'Priest, Prophet, and Exile: Ezekiel as a Literary Construct', in *EHW*, 78-79. But, of course, this begs the question of who Israel's god is. As argued in this chapter, he is a king, which colours all encounters with him in political tones. See also Chapter 8, §2.1 on the recognition formula.

¹²³ Stevenson, *Vision*, 16-19 and *passim*.

himself instructs the prophet to reveal what he saw (43:10). The question, of course, is what exactly Ezekiel saw and how it relates to Yhwh's kingship.

While Ezekiel 40-42 clearly show the prophet guided through a temple complex, the narrative nowhere identifies the significance of the tour. The mundane measurements and movements of the temple narrative cloak the meaning of the temple so that only an investigation of the narrative itself will reveal what Ezekiel saw and what Yhwh enjoins him to declare to the Israelites. But before casting backward to the tour narrative, the second half of 43:10 provides a first tool in unmasking the mysterious temple.

Yhwh tells the prophet that when the Israelites learn about the temple, 'they will be humiliated by their iniquities' (v. 10b. cf. v. 11a). The myriad studies on shame in the Hebrew Bible show opinion divided between shame as a symbol of social status governing relationship in the public sphere¹²⁴ and shame as a private emotion shaping the moral self.¹²⁵ However, in Ezek 43:10-11, a dichotomized approach to shame is unnecessary. Yhwh intends this shame to inculcate a moral perspective, presumably because the temple simultaneously confronts Israel with Yhwh's goodness and the moral failures of her past. Humiliation then results from an awareness of the discrepancy between reality and the ideal.¹²⁶ But shame also organizes the relationship

¹²⁴ Among others, L.M. Bechtel, 'Shame as Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming', *JSOT* 49 (1991): 47-76.

¹²⁵ Especially J. Lapsley, 'Shame and Self-knowledge: The Positive Role of Shame in Ezekiel's View of the Moral Self', in *BETAP*, 143-173. Cf. J. Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Contribution* (JSOTSup 346; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002). Oddly, both neglect Ezek 43:10-11.

¹²⁶ Cf. Ezek 16:59-63, 36:22-32 and Lapsley, 'Shame', 157-168, rightly challenging the social perspective of M.S. Odell, 'The Inversion of Shame and Forgiveness in Ezekiel 16.59-63', *JSOT* 56 (1992): 105.

between Israel and Yhwh. As a feature of Yhwh's kingship, the temple will display both the rightness of Yhwh's rule as well as the qualities of his rule, proving his superiority and vindicating his reputation, a common theme in Ezekiel (e.g., 36:23, 32; 38:16).¹²⁷

In Ezekiel 40-42 'temple' refers to both the three-roomed structure of the temple proper (40:47) and the entire temple complex (40:5).¹²⁸ Both domains might elicit shame if depicted by the prophet, but only the second option—the entire temple complex—makes sense of the whole temple tour. This sense of 'temple' shows that Yhwh's royal interests extend beyond the building typically identified as his house (the temple proper) to include a large space that will be devoted to his aims. While the temple proper measures only 50 cubits by 100 cubits, including its walls and buffer space (40:47-41:4), the temple complex is a plot of land measuring 500 cubits square (42:15-20) making it fifty times larger than the temple building.¹²⁹ Yhwh's reign is not limited to the traditional space. In his restored kingship, Yhwh dominates a breadth of territory because geography itself will exemplify the ideals of his reign.

4.2 Royal space

Before tracing Yhwh's concern with geography beyond the temple complex, a look at Ezekiel 40-42 illuminates Yhwh's key interest in physical space. From the outset, the reader of these chapters acquires two keys for seeing past the melange of mundane measurements to their significance. 1) The prophet

¹²⁷ W.D. Tucker, 'Is Shame a Matter of Patronage in the Communal Laments?', *JSOT* 31 (2007): 469-479.

¹²⁸ The lexeme **בית** also appears in 40:43 referring to a single chamber, not the temple.

¹²⁹ For a diagram, Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.541.

records that the ‘hand of Yhwh’ carried him in ‘divine visions’ (40:1-2). What the prophet sees, then, is not a terrestrial reality, even in Ezekiel’s near future,¹³⁰ but an other-worldly construct imparting a message for Yhwh’s people.¹³¹ 2) Yhwh places the prophet on a ‘very high mountain’ (40:2) from which the temple tour begins. While confirming the visional nature of the subsequent events, the designation ‘very high mountain’ also colours the vision in mythical tones, adding depth and weight.¹³² This mythic sense orients the vision so that seemingly ordinary details, such as the measurements, become statements about the deep reality of Yhwh’s reign. To know Yhwh’s house, then, is to know the king himself.

The most obvious feature of the temple narrative in Ezekiel 40-42 is the proliferation of measurements provided as the prophet’s guide ruthlessly applies his measuring rod to all objects ranging from tables to walls to door frames to courtyards. Notably, he devotes little time to the height of these objects. Only the exterior wall (40:5), the stone tables (40:42), the raised platform of the temple proper (41:8), and the wooden altar (41:22) receive height measurements. Primarily, then, the guide measures breadth and length, centring the tour’s focus on the layout of the temple, that is, the arrangement of space, not the construction of structures. The aim of the

¹³⁰Pace Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 425.

¹³¹Evaluating various proposals exceeds present concerns. Among others, Levenson sees an eschatological reality, *Theology*, 35. S.S. Tuell argued, instead, that Ezekiel sees the heavenly temple, ‘Ezekiel 40-42 as Verbal Icon’, *CBQ* 58 (1996): 649-664, though P. Joyce’s version of this option is stronger, ‘Ezekiel 40-42: The Earliest “Heavenly Ascent” Narrative?’, in *The Book of Ezekiel and Its Influence* (ed. H. J. de Jonge and J. Trompe; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 17-41.

¹³²On the mountain motif, see below §5.4.

guide's actions seems to be showing Ezekiel the organization of the temple complex.¹³³

Of the four vertical measurements, one points the way to cracking the conundrum of how the temple complex relates to Israel's humiliation (cf. 43:10) and to Yhwh's kingship. The raised platform of the temple proper elevates the structure above the level of the main inner court, creating a degree of separation that is fitting for Yhwh's dwelling place (cf. 43:7). Throughout the narrative of 40-42, separation is a driving concern, and the fixation on space shows that what Philip Jenson has rightly termed 'graded holiness' stands at the centre of the conceptual world in these chapters.¹³⁴

Holiness, the inherent quality of Yhwh himself, occurs at varying levels, with the inner room of the temple proper as the densest concentration.¹³⁵ The raised platform is just one example of the temple features that create separation between holy spheres. A more comprehensive study of the temple would marshal numerous other examples to show the thorough preoccupation with preserving the holiness of Yhwh's domain.

¹³³ Stevenson reaches this conclusion on account of the difficult word הכניה ('perfection', 'proportion'), *Vision*, 17-19. But the rarity of הכניה (elsewhere only Ezek 28:12), the similarity in form and meaning of הכנה ('layout, structure') in v. 11 and the more common הכניה (as in Exo 25:9, 2 Kgs 16:10, 1 Chr 28:11) allow that a scribal error has resulted in הכניה. Thus Zimmerli emends to 'layout' following LXX, while Fohrer even emends the supposed LXX *Vorlage*, *Ezechiel*, 237. D.M. O'Hare helpfully discusses these problems, 'Have You Seen, Son of Man?' *A Study in the Translation and Vorlage of LXX Ezekiel 40-48* (SCS 57; Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 104-106. Also, Joyce, 'Ezekiel 40-42', 29.

¹³⁴ P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992). Also, Haran, *Temples*, 158-63.

¹³⁵ Cf. S. Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000), 17. A worthy introduction to the massive literature on holiness is I. Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (trans. J. Feldman and P. Rodman; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 180-86.

For now, though, even this brief discussion is sufficient because the height of the platform (6 cubits) indicates that the sacred space of the temple proper deserved unique treatment. Examining the layout of the six gates, two each on the east, north and south sides of the complex, would further develop the impression that the importance of the temple complex lies in its arrangement. Equally, a look at the appurtenances of the complex, such as the rooms for sacrifices, the décor of the temple proper and the layout of the courtyards, would affirm that the tour of Ezekiel 40-42 provides a sumptuous insight into the character of the king, Yhwh, and the relationship that he expects to establish with his people.¹³⁶ And it is this character that the Israelites will appreciate as they hear the prophet ‘inform them about the temple’ (43:10).¹³⁷

The conciseness of Yhwh’s accession speech prevents him from specifying this perspective on the temple. But v. 11 offers a précis of Yhwh’s interests. Although the MT appears ‘overloaded’ when compared to the LXX, the gist is not obscured.¹³⁸ In short, Yhwh instructs the prophet to draw the temple for his audience so that they will know not only its ‘layout’ and ‘design’ but also its regulations.¹³⁹ As v. 12 makes clear, the overarching aim of

¹³⁶ H. Liss helpfully explores the non-spatial ramifications of the measurements within the societal ramifications of Ezekiel 40-48, “Describe the Temple to the House of Israel”: Preliminary Remarks on the Temple Vision in the Book of Ezekiel and the Question of Fictionality in Priestly Literatures’, in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature* (ed. E. Ben Zvi; PFES 92; Göttingen : Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

¹³⁷ Cf. Levenson’s insight that the temple is ‘public testimony to the nature of God’, *Theology*, 16.

¹³⁸ All contemporary scholars emend 43:11b. For options, Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.587-588 and Gese, *Verfassungsentwurf*, 40-43.

¹³⁹ As in Ezek 9:9, the juxtaposition of Yhwh’s royalty and scribal action may highlight Yhwh’s royal identity (Chapter 4, §4.2.1). But space constraints prevent further discussion except to

these regulations is utter holiness. The entirety of the temple complex, including the actions undertaken within its courts, will reflect the nature of the king himself. This ‘diffusion’ of holiness indicates that Yhwh extends his very essence beyond the expected boundaries of the temple proper.¹⁴⁰ Of course, Yhwh the holy god is also Yhwh the holy king. So, in diffusing holiness, Yhwh is also broadening his rule, and, as seen in the following sections, the breadth of Yhwh’s holy kingship is not limited even to the temple complex itself.

4.3 United Israel

In Ezekiel 40-48 Yhwh demonstrates that, like any king, he holds sway over not merely his own house but over a realm, an entire swath of land belonging to his people.¹⁴¹ Beyond the temple, the major geographical focus is the territory awaiting the restored twelve tribes (47:13-48:7; 48:23-29).¹⁴² Walter Brueggemann once opined that land is ‘a central if not the central theme’ of the Hebrew Bible,¹⁴³ and, as Block points out, in the Hebrew Bible Yhwh’s

declaim Hurowitz’s notion that the prophet records building instructions (as in 1 Chron 28:19), *Exalted House*, 254-255, n. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 229.

¹⁴¹ Stevenson, *Vision*, 123. But Stevenson’s eagerness to see a critique of monarchy tends to ignore that real issue is not a critique of monarchy per se but of those who transgressed Yhwh’s holiness.

¹⁴² Sandwiched between the disbursement of land to the tribes, 48:8-22 reprises Ezekiel 45 by detailing the allotments designated as common space and as belonging to the priests and the *nāšî?* Block (*Ezekiel*, 2.650) sees 48:8-22 as an expansion while Zimmerli (*Ezekiel*, 2.467) considers it the composition from which 45:1-8 was extracted. Ultimately, though, the distinction is immaterial for interpretation, as 48:8-22 clearly say more than the earlier section, perhaps to underscore the central place of the designated space. Cf. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 240.

¹⁴³ W. Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 3.

action of granting land is unequivocally the work of a sovereign.¹⁴⁴ Logically, then, the land distribution that concludes the book of Ezekiel is also the work of a king.

What is more, three references to inheritance in 47:13-14 resemble a grant that a king might order on behalf of his subjects.¹⁴⁵ Yhwh stipulates, ‘you shall divide among yourselves as an inheritance’ (תתנחלו), ‘you shall receive as an inheritance’ (נחלתם), and ‘the land shall fall to you as an inheritance (נחלה)’. Of course, a worthy objection to seeing a royal grant here is Israel’s patent unworthiness; Yhwh has denounced Judah as uniquely deserving of judgment (e.g., 16:34), whereas the Zadokites were simply less bad than their counterparts. But David Englehard observes that in the ancient world such grants might also fall to parties on the basis of expected *future* loyalty.¹⁴⁶ And this is precisely the circumstance in Ezekiel 47-48. The king (Yhwh) has already declared that he will dwell forever with his people (43:7), and, as seen earlier, this implies that Yhwh will ensure the loyalty of his people. The land, then, is emblematic of Yhwh’s kingship.

The boundaries of the land also speak to Yhwh’s kingship. On the whole, the territorial borders of the restored Israel partially resemble the boundaries of the land that Yhwh promised to the ‘fathers’ (47:14), as comparison between Ezek 47:15-20, Num 34:1-12, and Joshua 13-21 shows. The

¹⁴⁴ Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.708. Again, though, Block refrains from linking Yhwh’s action in Ezekiel 40-48 with Yhwh’s royal identity that permeates the book.

¹⁴⁵ Weinfeld, *Covenant of Grant*, 190. Cf. §3.3.2 above and the favour lavished upon the Zadokites.

¹⁴⁶ D.H. Engelhard, ‘Ezekiel 47:13-48:29 as Royal Grant’, in ‘Go to the Land I Will Show You’: *Essays in Honour of Dwight W. Young* (ed. J.E. Coleson and V.H. Matthews; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 54-55.

chronological ditch between modern readers and Ezekiel prevents precise identification of all points he envisions, giving rise to numerous suggestions.¹⁴⁷ But most agree that the eastern border indicates a compliance with the central aim of Yhwh's kingship: holiness. By one account, no tribes receive land east of the Jordan, meaning that all land falls within the historic grant to Israel and that no pagan land is included. Consequently, Yhwh's sanctity is safeguarded.¹⁴⁸

The territorial boundaries further tout Yhwh's kingship by pointing to a united Israel. The ideal of equal disbursement of territory (47:14) ensures concord among the tribes,¹⁴⁹ as does the north-south arrangement of tribes that balances (historical) power in the centre next to Yhwh's own portion.¹⁵⁰ Unlike in Ezekiel 34 and 37, however, talk of a reunited nation does not beckon the Davidic *nāšî'* to be king. Rather, the geographical throwbacks to pre-monarchic Israel suggest that the proper arrangement of power structures requires Yhwh's kingship and no other.¹⁵¹ While the restored Israel enjoys the leadership of the *nāšî'*, Yhwh retains ultimate power because he,

¹⁴⁷ Compare Tuell, *Law*, 153-170 and K.D. Hutchens, 'Defining the Boundaries: A Cultic Interpretation of Numbers 34:1-12 and Ezekiel 47:13-48:1,28', in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes* (ed. M.P. Graham, W.P. Brown, and J.K. Kuan; JSOTSup 173; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 215-230.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Levenson, *Theology*, 115. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.526-543. Contrast Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.707-716.

¹⁴⁹ M. Greenberg, 'Idealism and Practicality in Numbers 35:4-5 and Ezekiel 48', *JAOS* (1968): 59-66.

¹⁵⁰ Brodsky, 'Map', 23. Cf. Levenson, *Theology*, 118. B. Simon creatively explicates the recompense and reordering that laces the final vision, 'Ezekiel's Geometric Vision of the Restored Temple: From the Rod of His Wrath to the Reed of his Measuring', *HTR* 102 (2009): 411-438.

¹⁵¹ Levenson stops just short of this conclusion, *Theology*, 112.

not the *nāšîʾ*, disburses Israel's land and orchestrates her well-being far beyond the *nāšîʾ* or even previous kings.

While the geographical boundaries are significant, the import of the land allocation lies beneath the surface of talk about national borders. For, buried in the list of place names is the reality that here Yhwh establishes himself as king over a restored nation. In stating 'you shall inherit' (47:13-14), Yhwh himself addresses the nation as a whole. While he asserted the legitimacy of his kingship in the accession speech (43:7-12), here Yhwh shows that his rule flows to all points of the compass. A legitimate king has both people and land, and, with twelve tribes receiving land, Yhwh indicates that the promise to join Israel and Judah (37:16-28) will take root in the soil that historically belonged to his people (47:14).¹⁵² The *nāšîʾ* may be a legitimate king, but Yhwh is equally so. And his kingship, unlike the *nāšîʾ*'s, is the main attraction for Ezekiel.

4.4 Yhwh's city

In closing the territory disbursement, Yhwh narrows his focus to the city that lies south of the common land. Already the city has appeared cursorily (45:7, 48:18-21), but now Yhwh expands its significance and in so doing cements the import of his kingship for the restored nation envisioned in Ezekiel 40-48.

As Ezek 48:35 states, 'The name of the city from that day shall be "Yhwh Is There (יהוה שמה/Yhwh Shammah)".'¹⁵³ With near unanimity, scholars have emphasized the second word of the city's name, noting that the presence

¹⁵² If Widengren's argument holds true regarding return and royalty, then beneath the text is yet another claim of Yhwh's suitability as political leader of Israel, for Ezekiel 40-48 mentions no gathering of the dispersed, assuming that Yhwh has already effected it. Cf. Chapter 6, §4.5.

¹⁵³ Both the versions and the rabbis read יהוה שמה variously, but Keil, *Ezekiel*, 2.382 soundly defends the rendering 'Yhwh is there'.

of Yhwh recurs throughout the book as crucial to the book's argument. As the reasoning goes, the distinctive patterning of the 'divine visions' (1-3, 8-11, 40-48) evidences a particular interest in Yhwh's location, or, better, his presence and absence.¹⁵⁴ Understandably, then, *Yhwh Shammah* has been enlisted as conclusive evidence that Ezekiel's world orbits around the divine presence of Yhwh.¹⁵⁵ Thus Eichrodt exults that the city's name recalls 'Immanuel' and points to the necessity of 'full fellowship with God'.¹⁵⁶ However, *Yhwh Shammah* is also a royal ripple caused by the initial splash of Yhwh's kingship in 43:7. It is the book's final indication that Yhwh is king.

In Ezekiel's world, the king's right to name cities was commonplace. Famously, of course, the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles refer to a district in Jerusalem as the 'city of David'. 2 Sam 5:7-9 even offers an aetiology, ascribing the name to David himself as demonstration of his military prowess.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, the Egyptian kings were hardly shy about self-exaltation, as even the Hebrew Bible suggests with its mention of the storage city Raamses (Exo 1:11).¹⁵⁸

Farther afield, Neo-Assyrian kings, whose empire Ezekiel's Babylon largely subsumed, rampaged across Mesopotamia, leaving cities with names

¹⁵⁴ Chiefly, Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 101-149. Cf. Rudnig, 'Ezechiel 40-48', 533.

¹⁵⁵ As D. Block, 'Divine Abandonment', 41.

¹⁵⁶ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 593-594.

¹⁵⁷ Contrast with 1 Chr 11:7 which attributes the name not to David's conquering but to his dwelling in the location.

¹⁵⁸ Amongst the voluminous literature on this city and its counterpart Pithom, a worthy introduction is E. P. Uphill, 'Pithom and Raamses: Their Location and Significance', *JNES* 27 (1968): 291-316.

such as Dur-Šarrukin or Kar-Esarhaddon. Sargon II and Esarhaddon were, of course, the titular kings, and, in their day, they reigned with unrivalled power that permitted urban naming privileges. For example, after capturing Harhar, Sargon II initiated a massive building campaign and changed the city's name to Kar-Šarrukin.¹⁵⁹ And one account of Esarhaddon's conquests records, '...I called together all the kings of the country Hatti and from the seacoast and made them build a town on a new location, calling its name Kar-Esarhaddon'.¹⁶⁰ The naming practices of these kings mirror the work of the king depicted in Ezekiel 40-48.¹⁶¹

Building on Ezekiel 38-39, the final vision portrays Yhwh as a victorious king who establishes his kingdom after single-handedly dismantling the earth's mightiest monarch (Gog). The final verses of Ezekiel (48:30-35) bear out Yhwh's royalty by granting him the kingly prerogative to name an eponymous city. Here also the Ezekielian ambiguity reappears, for Yhwh's city has already featured in the final vision. The earlier city was the nameless, visional temple, while *Yhwh Shammah* is an urban construct named by the eponymous king in order to indicate his power over and solidarity with his people. Ezekiel fails to spell out how the royal presence spans the gap between the temple-city and *Yhwh Shammah*, but the name of the city sufficiently indicates that the king deigns to interact with his people.

¹⁵⁹ 'Return from Media; Building the Walls of Kar-Šarrukin', (A. Fuchs and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III* [SAA 15; Helsinki: Helsinki University, 2001], §94).

¹⁶⁰ 'The Syro-Palestinian Campaign', translated by A.L. Oppenheim, (*ANET*, 291).

¹⁶¹ Among the plethora of other examples, cf. *Kar-Shalmaneser* and *Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta*. Note that though Yhwh is the god of Israel, *Yhwh Shammah* finds its closest parallel in these cities named after kings rather than the cities named after gods such as *Kar-Aššur*, on account of Yhwh's kingly portrayal in Ezekiel 40-48.

The note regarding the circumference of the city—4,500 cubits on four sides—(48:35a) indicates that the entire city receives the name *Yhwh Shammah*.¹⁶² And the twelve gates, each named for one tribe (vv. 31-34), confirm an equality of access, punctuated by the literal formulation ‘the gate of Reuben, one; the gate of Judah, one’, etc. Even Levi, excluded from the land distribution common to the other tribes, receives a gate. This symbol of unity yet again indicates that the full expression of Yhwh’s kingship requires and effects political wholeness for his people. Yhwh’s kingly presence unifies his people, and brief comparison with widespread royal practice in the ancient world shows that the city, *Yhwh Shammah*, particularly in its editorial location as the final word of the book, further indicates that Yhwh’s kingship pervades the vision of Ezekiel 40-48.¹⁶³

4.5 The river

As a king invested in the affairs of his people, Yhwh allocates the land where his reunited and reconstituted people will live. But his kingship is not merely a force subjecting people to his authority.¹⁶⁴ It is also the vehicle for ensuring

¹⁶²Block rightly notes that the square layout of the city resembles the holy district of Marduk in Babylon, *Ezekiel*, 2.736-738. But, since *Yhwh Shammah* is a city, a more fitting explanation is that the square has featured prominently in the geography of Ezekiel 40-48 (e.g., the temple complex at 500 cubits per side) as a symbol of order and perfection. Cf. Simon, ‘Geometric Vision’, 415-418. Also, Dur-Šarrukin was uniquely rectangular owing to Sargon’s plan to use the city as his new capital, Mieroop, *City*, 58. And, whatever its value for reconstructing positivistic history, Herodotus’ *History* (1.178) further suggests that a square city was an ancient trope. He describes Babylon as ‘in shape a square, each side an hundred and twenty furlongs in length; thus four hundred and eighty furlongs make the complete circuit of the city’.

¹⁶³Cf. I.B. Gottlieb, ‘“Sof Davar”: Biblical Endings’, *Prooftexts* 11 (1991): 213-224.

¹⁶⁴*Pace* B.J. Schwartz who sees the book of Ezekiel as permitting Yhwh ‘to torment and gloat, to instil self-loathing rather than faith in divine succour’, ‘Ezekiel’s Dim View of Israel’s Restoration’, in *BETAP*, 64. But, Schwartz neglects the river of Ezekiel 47.

their thriving, as indicated by the water flowing eastward from the temple proper.¹⁶⁵

The guide and the prophet track the water and discover that the original trickle becomes a lively river (v. 5) which vivifies (nearly) all it encounters, including the Dead Sea (vv. 8-9). The quadruple occurrence of כָּל ('all, every') in v. 9 underscores its comprehensive beneficence.¹⁶⁶ The one exception to the healing quality of the river, that the 'swamps and marshes...will give salt', not fresh water (v. 11), ironically, may also contribute to overarching health, since salt is a preservative.

The river springs from the temple, that is, from the royal abode, thereby forging a link with Yhwh the king. Like the breath that resurrected the deserted skeletons of Ezekiel 37, the life-giving waters also emanate from Yhwh himself. Yhwh's kingship is the source of all life for the restored Israel.¹⁶⁷ While the Hebrew Bible affirms that all good things stem from divine provision (e.g. Psa 104), overwhelming generosity was also an attribute, if not responsibility, of the king. Psalm 72 enjoins Yhwh to make the king 'like rain that falls on cut grass, like showers that drench the earth' (v. 6).¹⁶⁸ And Psalm 145 addresses Yhwh as 'my god, the king', going on to laud his generosity to 'every living thing' (v. 16).

¹⁶⁵ On both internal and external coherence of 47:1-12, Rudnig, *Heilig*, 168-169; Gese, *Verfassungsentwurf*, 94-95. As one example of links beyond 40-48, Ezek 36:8 promises luxuriant foliage upon the mountains that Yhwh has judged.

¹⁶⁶ Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.694.

¹⁶⁷ Stevenson comes closest to this reading of the river but still fails to link the river explicitly to Yhwh's kingship, *Vision*, 142. Cf. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 334.

¹⁶⁸ The narrative of Hezekiah and the water tunnel (2 Kgs 20:20, 2 Chr 32:2-4, 30) may owe to a similar theme.

While the narrative of Ezekiel 47 first notes ‘the temple’ (הבית) as the geographical source, the report later restates the source as ‘the holy place’ (מקדש). This variation draws attention to the underlying import of the source: it is holy. It is no stretch, then, to see the river as transporting distilled holiness to otherwise dead districts of the restored nation.¹⁶⁹ As already noted, holiness is the distinctive quality of Yhwh’s reign, the mark that he is king. The waters from the temple thus carry Yhwh’s essence, imprinting the mark of his reign upon all they encounter.

The river also displays Yhwh’s royal power. In the ancient world desperation for water fomented tortuous power struggles so that commandeering water signalled a ruler’s supremacy over his competitors.¹⁷⁰ But Yhwh faces no competitors, implying that peace dominates his domain.¹⁷¹ Further, the water he provides bursts any attempt at containment, speaking to the power of the king himself. Block intriguingly suggests that the measurements of vv. 3-5 speak to the immensity of the river by establishing a pattern of profundity. The bronze man measures every thousand cubits, and at each measure, the depth of the water increases. Within four measures the water increases from ankle-deep to over the prophet’s head. Block floats the additional idea that the reader of Ezekiel 47 should continue to extrapolate the measurements.¹⁷² Unfortunately, this claim is indemonstrable, but the

¹⁶⁹ Cf. W. Zwickel, ‘Die Tempelquelle Ezechiel 47: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung’, *EvT* 55 (1995): 154.

¹⁷⁰ S. Dalley, ‘Ancient Mesopotamian Military Organization’, in *CANE*, 1.413.

¹⁷¹ On this matrix of ideas in Ezekiel’s broader world, S. Anthonioz, *L’eau, enjeux politiques et théologiques, de Sumer à la Bible* (VTSup 131; Leiden: Brill, 2009), esp. 471-536.

¹⁷² Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.692. But contrast Zimmerli, ‘the measuring process...could actually be dispensed without loss’, *Ezekiel*, 2.509.

point is taken: the river issuing from Yhwh's dwelling is beyond comprehension.¹⁷³

The geographical course of the river also indicates its enormity. In order to reach the destination of the Dead Sea, the river must flood not only the Kidron valley but also the Mount of Olives and the eastern hills.¹⁷⁴ Since the text makes no provision for removing these obstacles, the assumption is that the water charts its own path. As Yhwh's river stretches the imagination, it tightens the picture of Yhwh's kingship. If the river derives its immensity and healing properties from Yhwh, then Yhwh himself must be greater still, for, with his royal power, Yhwh brings life. Indeed, power and life are inextricably intertwined, a reality that the shepherds of Ezekiel 34 neglected to embody but that Yhwh, the true king, exudes so fully that even the created order displays his qualities. The implication is clear: when Yhwh restores his people, his royal presence will flood the land with unparalleled fecundity and peace.

At the same time, the context of the larger vision cautions against too close an association between the river and the historical world in which Ezekiel envisions Israel's restoration.¹⁷⁵ As noted earlier, the location of the visional temple, the 'very high mountain' (40:2), registers the sights of the vision in a higher plane than mere history, what Levenson has termed the

¹⁷³ Perhaps, also, four as the symbol of completeness is at work. But pressing the river into the model of 'humble origin, massive impact' as Allen (*Ezekiel*, 2.279) risks missing the point.

¹⁷⁴ Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.694. In more depth, W.R. Farmer, 'The Geography of Ezekiel's River of Life', *BA* 19 (1956): 17-22.

¹⁷⁵ Contra G.W. Buchanan, 'Running Water at the Temple of Zion', *ExpTim* 115 (2004): 289-292.

‘suprahistorical’.¹⁷⁶ For that matter, the river itself so transcends physical realities as to exclude an actual river from Ezekiel’s considerations; the dimensions and effects of the river are surreal. Whether the temple river draws on Edenic motifs¹⁷⁷ or the symbolic significance of the bronze sea in Solomon’s temple,¹⁷⁸ even this brief exploration shows that the royal dynamic of Ezekiel 40-48 has infiltrated even the extraordinary stream of Ezek 47:1-12 with its political agenda in order to portray Yhwh as a legitimate king for his people.¹⁷⁹

5. Kingship and law

In Ezekiel 40-48, a pervasive interest in Yhwh’s kingship is clear from his engagement of human power structures (§3), geographical pronouncements (§4) and, finally, law. As king, Yhwh is the law-giver. Of course most law in the Hebrew Bible has divine origin, not royal. As Greenberg states, ‘...no

¹⁷⁶ Levenson, *Theology*, 14. Accordingly, H.G. May sees the river’s source as the cosmic deep, ‘Some Cosmic Connotations of the Mayyim Rabbim’, *JBL* 54 (1955): 9-21.

¹⁷⁷ S.S. Tuell, ‘The Rivers of Paradise: Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Genesis 2:10-14’, in *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (ed. W.P. Brown and S.D. McBride; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 171-189. Levenson, *Theology*, 11-14, 25-36.

¹⁷⁸ Zwickel, *Tempelquelle*, 148-154. Also, but without noting Zwickel, V.A. Hurowitz ‘Yhwh’s Exalted House: Aspects of the Design and Symbolism of Solomon’s Temple’, in *Temple and Worship*, 80-82.

¹⁷⁹ Most similarly, Zechariah 14 and Isaiah 33 juxtapose Yhwh’s kingship and abundant waters. Discussing more broadly related passages, M.A. Fishbane, ‘The Well of Living Water: A Biblical Motif and Its Ancient Transformations’, in *‘Sha’arei Talmon’: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon* (ed. E. Tov, W.W. Fields, and M.A. Fishbane; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 3-16.

Israelite king is said to have authored a law code...the only legislator the Bible knows is God...'.¹⁸⁰

How then might law function as a royal feature in Ezekiel 40-48? Keith Whitelam observed that 'there is little unambiguous evidence to suggest that monarchical judicial authority extended to the promulgation of law'.¹⁸¹ But even ambiguous evidence—such as Solomon's episode with the prostitute's baby (1 Kgs 3:16-28)—suggests the possibility of legitimately joining lawgiving with the king.¹⁸² Further, Whitelam recognizes that the Torah lacks enough legislation to provide for every circumstance of Israel's ordinary life.¹⁸³ So, to neglect relevant material based on a preference for purportedly historical events appears to restrict admissible evidence too narrowly.¹⁸⁴

5.1 Precedents

A prime example of ambiguous but helpful evidence arises in 1 Samuel 30 as David appears to establish a legal precedent. Hot in pursuit of rampaging Amalekites, David abandons two hundred of his men who find the march too strenuous (v. 10). When David and the energetic soldiers return to their weaker counterparts, the now triumphant warrior prohibits the laggards from sharing the booty (v. 24). The narrator then adds 'and he made it a

¹⁸⁰ M. Greenberg, 'Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law' in *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume: Studies in Bible and Jewish Religion Devoted to Yehezkel Kaufmann on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (ed., M. Haran; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 11.

¹⁸¹ Whitelam, *Just King*, 217-218.

¹⁸² Whitelam, *Just King*, 216. Cf. Brettler, *God is King*, 110: '...these sources are important because they reflect various popular perceptions of the king's judicial role.'

¹⁸³ Recently, G.J. Wenham, 'The Gap between Law and Ethics in the Bible', *JJS* 48 (1997): 17-29.

¹⁸⁴ R. Westbrook and B. Wells, *Everyday Law in Biblical Israel: An Introduction* (Louisville: WJK, 2009), 13.

statute and a law for Israel from that day until now' (v. 25). David the warlord has become David the law-giver. Admittedly, to this point in the narrative only Yhwh and Samuel have recognized David as king (1 Sam 16:1-13); his public anointing occurs only after Saul's death (2 Sam 2:4).¹⁸⁵ But the text itself originated in a time when David was known as monarch (whether historically or ideally is immaterial). Apparently, then, linking law-giver and king did not create an inordinate clash of ideas.¹⁸⁶

Further connection between non-divine law-giving and political duties appears as Deborah and Barak celebrate victory over Jabin king of Canaan (Judges 5). Their poem congratulates Israel's leaders, including those designated חוקקי ישראל (v. 9) and מִחַקְקִים (v. 14). Both terms derive from the same root, חקק ('to inscribe, decree'), that also gives the legal terms חק and חקה meaning 'statute'.¹⁸⁷ In some respect, then, ancient Israel associated law-giving with political leadership, even if here the terms are devoid of judicial connotations.¹⁸⁸

Granted that pursuit of etymological support must tread gently, a similar title ascribed to Yhwh strengthens the case: 'Yhwh is our judge, Yhwh is our מִחַקֵּק, Yhwh is our king. He will save us' (Isa 33:22). Here the

¹⁸⁵ W. Brueggemann sees a prefiguring of David's kingship, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 204. Cf. R. Westbrook 'Biblical Law', in *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber: the Writings of Raymond Westbrook* (ed. B. Wells and F.R. Magdalene; 2 vols.; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 2.301.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Whitelam, 98.

¹⁸⁷ B. Lindars offers the gloss, 'those who make decrees', *Judges 1-5: A New Translation and Commentary* (ed. A.D.H. Mayes; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 242. And D.I. Block sees a royal office, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 228.

¹⁸⁸ H. Cazelles, 'Déborah (Jud 5:14), Amaleq et Mâkir', *VT* 24 (1974): 238. Cf. Deut 33:21.

rapprochement between ‘judge’ and ‘king’ suggests that מֹחֵקֵק is also a royal title.¹⁸⁹ Since the context of Isaiah 33 prevents the speakers—desperate Israel—from adopting the role of a military force, the gloss ‘commander’ is ill-suited for מֹחֵקֵק. Further, the salvation that Yhwh will achieve pertains to the establishment of an ideal society. The people need a ruler to ensure justice, precisely the task of a judge and king. The term מֹחֵקֵק thus likely communicates something of a legal sense, rather than the military idea at play in Judges 5. So, Yhwh is hailed ‘our מֹחֵקֵק’, that is, the one who decrees, the lawgiver.

Even if only here, the Hebrew Bible explicitly links law-giving and kingship.¹⁹⁰ And, although the subject is Yhwh and not a human king, the plea for deliverance to which Yhwh is the answer is decidedly political. Yhwh accomplishes what human leaders cannot because he is the supreme leader, the exalted king. It follows, then, that Yhwh receives this political designation not as an innovation but as a reflection of what the prophet perceived as necessary for the proper functioning of the ideal society that he envisioned.

Although Greenberg and Whitelam disparage the possibility of identifying Israel’s king as lawgiver, a final consideration rescues the possibility of seeing law creation as a royal function for Yhwh. A glance beyond the Hebrew Bible shows that royal figures featured as lawgivers.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ H.G.M. Williamson sees these attributes as ‘an especially forceful expression’ of Yhwh’s kingship, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah’s Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 226. Cf. 237.

¹⁹⁰ Although Deut 17:18-19 require the king to write law, at stake is devotional practice, not law promulgation, as indicated by the stipulations regarding Levitic oversight. G.N. Knoppers states that here the king has ‘no warrant to enlarge his authority at the expense of others’, ‘The Deuteronomist and the Deuteronomic Law of the King’, *ZAW* 108 (1996): 335. This, then, rules out lawgiving. Cf. J.G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC 5; Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 295.

¹⁹¹ In addition to Hammurabi, a larger case here might also consider the characterization of Yhwh as a royal figure in Deuteronomy. If with Hittite background, then as a suzerain, an older

Chapter 7—The Fullness of Kingship

The classic example is Hammurabi of Babylon (eighteenth century BCE) whose famous laws have attracted a scholarly retinue since their unearthing in 1902.¹⁹² The precise provenance of these laws remains debated, particularly as scholars wrangle over whether the laws reflect actual legal practice.¹⁹³ Regardless, the text clearly styles Hammurabi as the giver of the law by divine sanction, a matter that has not gone unnoticed. Some fifty years ago J.J. Finkelstein posited that, whatever their relation to Old Babylonian legal life, Hammurabi's laws served primarily as royal propaganda to secure Hammurabi's legacy.¹⁹⁴ What is more, Finkelstein argued that Hammurabi did not invent this practice but followed the pattern of his Mesopotamian predecessors Ur-Namma (twenty-second century BCE) and Lipit-Ishtar (twentieth century BCE). More recently, Raymond Westbrook developed this hypothesis, observing that the laws countenance such a breadth of circumstances in order to depict Hammurabi as universally powerful.¹⁹⁵

Perusal of the literature finds an unresolved dispute regarding the relationship between Hammurabi's laws and the Hebrew Bible.¹⁹⁶

theory recently revived, J. Berman, 'CTH 133 and the Hittite Provenance of Deuteronomy 13', *JBL* 130 (2011): 25-44. If, Neo-Assyrian, then a king to rival Esarhaddon, as in Weinfeld's classic formulation, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 59-157.

¹⁹² For text and translation, M.E.J. Richardson, *Hammurabi's Laws: Text, Translation and Glossary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 40-41.

¹⁹³ J. Bottéro forcefully disputes any view of the laws as intended for implementation, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (trans. Z. Bahrani and M. Van de Mieroop; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 160-184.

¹⁹⁴ J.J. Finkelstein, 'Ammisaduqa's Edict and the Babylonian "Law Codes"', *JCS* 15 (1961): 91-104.

¹⁹⁵ Westbrook, 'Codex Hammurabi and the Ends of the Earth', in *Law from the Tigris*, 1.139.

¹⁹⁶ Recently, D.P. Wright, *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi* (Oxford: OUP, 2009).

Fortunately, however, present interests concern only the identity of the lawgiver. Even though Hammurabi himself did not compose the laws, he is portrayed as the source of the laws.¹⁹⁷ Like the Hebrew Bible, Hammurabi's law code reflects plausible practices in order to strengthen the credibility of the king.¹⁹⁸ And so Ezekiel also presents Yhwh as a royal lawgiver in a move geared to heighten the impression that Yhwh is a triumphant ruler whose reign will create unsurpassed justice for all who accept his kingship. In no way is this a claim to literary dependence between Ezekiel and Hammurabi's laws, but even this brief exposition of Hammurabi's persona in the famous document bearing his name illuminates the equally magnificent royal persona of Ezekiel's Yhwh.¹⁹⁹

5.2 The law of the temple

The final segment of Yhwh's accession speech is a legal declaration, 'This is the law of the temple: the entirety of the top of the mountain shall be most wholly. Behold, this is the law of the temple' (43:12). While the verse undoubtedly emphasizes the holiness of the temple complex, the legal nature of this declaration deserves consideration. The double use of the term 'law' (תורה/*torah*) suggests that this verse countenances more than simply declaring holiness as a feature of Yhwh's kingship. Rather, it is a legal declaration. As is well-known, the semantics of *torah* are not exclusively legal, e.g., Prov 1:8. But

¹⁹⁷ Cf. M. Van De Mieroop, *King Hammurabi of Babylon: A Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 99-109, 122-134.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Westbrook, 'Cuneiform Law Codes and the Origins of Legislation', in *Law from the Tigris*, 1.73-95.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. the method and investigations of D. Launderville, *Piety and Politics: the Dynamics of Royal Authority in Homeric Greece, Biblical Israel and Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

even if used in the broader sense of ‘instruction’, *torah* is still a legal term because it encompasses a prescribed behaviour, particularly as issued here from the king. In using *torah*, Yhwh opts for a term that subsumes the more specific ‘statute’, ‘law’ (משפט) and ‘command’ (מצוה).²⁰⁰

W.G.E. Watson has observed that ‘if we do not divide a text into its structural units correctly, then we will fail to grasp its meaning’.²⁰¹ So, the following discussion of Yhwh’s royal relationship to the law depends in part on seeing Ezek 43:1-12 as a cohesive structural unit. As with much of Ezek 43:1-12, consensus on this matter is elusive. Some append v. 12 to the subsequent verses rather than to vv. 1-11. Block’s strongest objection against reading v. 12 with vv. 1-11 notes the consonance between the wrongs Ezekiel condemned earlier and the proper practices required in the prescriptive section of 43:13-46:24.²⁰² Wevers concurs with Block but hails the Septuagint as chief support since it lacks the repeated phrase ‘this is the law of the temple’.²⁰³ Cooke represents many in taking the verse as summarizing the tour of Ezekiel 40-42 rather than as particularly linked to vv. 1-11.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, in spite of worthy

²⁰⁰ Cf. the dictum of G. Östborn, ‘The concepts “law” and “instruction” must not seldom overlap’, *Tōrā in the Old Testament: A Semantic Study* (trans. C. Hentschel; Lund: Ohlssons, 1945), 2.

²⁰¹ W.G.E. Watson, ‘Unit Delimitation in the Old Testament: An Appraisal’, in *Method in Unit Delimitation* (ed. M.C.A. Korpel, J.M. Oesch, and S.E. Porter; Pericope 6; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 162.

²⁰² Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.591. Cf. Gese, *Verfassungsentwurf*, 45.

²⁰³ Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 313.

²⁰⁴ Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 466.

arguments to the contrary, three factors compellingly link v. 12 to Yhwh's accession speech.²⁰⁵

1) The construction of the verse suggests that 'the law of the temple' is contained within the verse itself. Rather than introducing 43:13-46:24, v. 12 provides the law that it highlights: 'the entirety of the top of the mountain shall be most holy'. Many scholars note that elsewhere the formula 'this is the law...' both introduces and concludes legislation.²⁰⁶ But Ezek 43:12 finds its closest counterpart not in legal headings or footers but in the literary device called *inclusio*.²⁰⁷

Although particularly common in poetry,²⁰⁸ *inclusios* appear throughout the Hebrew Bible.²⁰⁹ A relevant non-poetic example is the repeated phrase of Num 7:84a, 88b: 'This was the dedication for the altar...'. The intervening verses (84b-88a) summarize the gifts that the leaders of Israel had brought to celebrate the inauguration of the altar (vv. 10-83). The first part of the *inclusio* (v. 84) introduces the summary that occupies vv. 84b-88a, while the second part concludes it. The *inclusio* in Lev 14:54a and 57b is even more notable. Here, the phrase 'this is the law...' brackets a *précis* of the legal

²⁰⁵ Cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.419.

²⁰⁶ E.g., introducing: Lev 6:1 (ET 6:9), 6:7 (ET 6:14), 6:18 (ET 6:25), 7:1, 7:11; concluding: Lev 7:37, 13:59, 14:32.

²⁰⁷ As others, Tuell recognizes the *inclusio* but does not enquire about the literary function of the device, assuming that the formula 'this is the law...' is sufficient indication to the verse's function, *Law*, 45-46.

²⁰⁸ L. Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (trans. A. Graffy; SubBib 11; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1988), 191.

²⁰⁹ In his renowned speech, J. Muilenburg stated, 'There are scores of illustrations of this phenomenon in all parts of the OT', 'Form Criticism and Beyond', *JBL* 88 (1969): 9.

material that occupied 13:1-14:53. While the formula ‘this is the law...’ appears elsewhere as a conclusion of earlier instruction, Lev 14:54 functions analogously to the first half of the inclusion in Num 7:84, because it opens a textual unit. The restatement of ‘this is the law...’ in v. 57 indicates that the section of law opened by v. 54 has now closed.²¹⁰ Marking closure, after all, is what an *inclusio* does.²¹¹

Returning to Ezek 43:12, the function of the repeated phrase is clearer. The verse is a self-contained unit on par with Num 7:84-88 and Lev 14:54-57. In restating ‘this is the law of the temple’, Yhwh communicates that the law itself has been aired, just as Num 7:88b indicates that ‘the dedication for the altar’ has been described. To take Ezek 43:12 as introducing a section of legal material (per Block) is thus to miss the textual artistry that announces the law itself. Strictly speaking, then, the law of the temple is not the instruction regarding the altar in 43:13-27 or the *nāšî*’s responsibilities, etc. These practices surely expand the law, stipulating how the law itself is applied. But Yhwh is clear, this is the law of the temple: comprehensive holiness.²¹² The overarching quality of Yhwh’s reign is also his supreme command.

2) Another factor linking v. 12 to Yhwh’s accession speech is the nature of the following verses. Ezek 43:13 begins, ‘And these are the measurements of the altar’.²¹³ Scholars who read v. 12 as opening a legal corpus contend

²¹⁰ On both passages, cf. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 58.

²¹¹ C. Wyckoff, ‘Have We Come Full Circle Yet? Closure, Psycholinguistics, and Problems of Recognition with the *Inclusio*’, *JSOT* 30 (2006): 475-505.

²¹² Cf. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 229 and Alonso Schökel, *Poetics*, 191.

²¹³ Admittedly, v.13 seems bereft of a context with v. 12 attached to vv. 1-11. Since further study of the altar and its literary location strain the current focus, a worthy primer on both is M. Dijkstra, ‘The Altar of Ezekiel: Fact or Fiction?’, *VT* 42 (1992): 22-36. More recently, B. Boyle, “Holiness

(either outright or by implication) that the measurements of the altar are the first instalment of the ‘law of the temple’. However, measurements dominated the temple tour of Ezekiel 40-42, and it is passing strange to suppose that the dimensions of the altar would merit inclusion in ‘the law of the temple’ while others would not. For example, are not the measurements of the temple proper (40:48-41:5) of equal importance? Or, why should a profile of the temple kitchens (46:21-24) occur as a ‘law of the temple’ but not the instruction for priests’ holy clothing (42:13-14)? Neglect of the inclusio in 43:12 generates inconsistencies, if not absurdities, but attaching the verse to Yhwh’s accession speech relieves these problems.

3) Finally, although notable, the absence of the inclusio in the Old Greek does not certify a claim to read v. 12 as a heading for legal material. As already noted, the phrase ‘this is the law...’ comfortably concludes legislation as well as introduces it. If evidence from the Greek text is admissible, it bears that noting three Greek manuscripts register a text division after v. 12 as well as after v. 17, suggesting that the Greek translators viewed vv. 13-17 as distinct from the preceding verses.²¹⁴ Conveniently, the MT lodges divisions in the same places, placing the extended space signifying a ‘section closure’ (*setumah*).²¹⁵ The Greek divisions after vv. 12 and 17 are even more intriguing,

has a Shape”: the Place of the Altar in Ezekiel’s Visionary Plan of Sacral Space (Ezekiel 43:1-12, 13-17, 18-27)’, *ABR* 57 (2009): 1-21.

²¹⁴ Olley, *Ezekiel*, 59; cf. 521. The manuscripts are Vaticanus, Papyrus 967, and Alexandrinus.

²¹⁵ Cf. M.C.A. Korpel, ‘Introduction to the Series Pericope’, in *Delimitation Criticism: A New Tool in Biblical Scholarship* (ed. M.C.A. Korpel and J.M. Oesch; Pericope 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000), 3.

however, since the text lacks a keyword that would signal the division.²¹⁶

Although perhaps ill-advised to practice mind reading across the millennia, it seems that the Greek translator(s) recognized that v. 12 belongs best in conjunction with vv. 1-11.

5.3 Holiness as law

What is clear, however, is that v. 12 forms a satisfactory conclusion to Yhwh's accession speech. By stating 'this is the law...', Yhwh designates the standard for all matters related to the temple. In this respect, the English 'law' fails fully to represent the sense of the Hebrew *torah*. The *torah* of the temple encompasses but is not limited to behavioural regulations; hence the common gloss 'instruction' (cf. §5.2 above). This is not to deny the legal quality of Yhwh's decree, for, inasmuch as the *torah* of holiness denotes the underlying (or overarching) reality of Yhwh's reign, Yhwh has promulgated law after the fashion of a king in the ancient world.

The contrast with *torah* in v. 11 clarifies that v. 12 uses this broad sense of *torah*. In v. 11 Yhwh commands the prophet to draw the people's attention to the intricacies of his royal abode. In this context, *torah* needs none of the comprehensiveness that its use in v. 12 suggests. If it did, an odd disjunction between vv. 11 and 12 would arise. What is more, in v. 11 *torah* occurs in the plural while in v. 12 it is singular.²¹⁷ Clearly, then, the only sensible reading of

²¹⁶E.g., 'measured', brought, 'son of man', etc. Cf. the catalogue for Ezekiel 40-48 in Olley, *Ezekiel*, 58-60. The correspondence between Greek and Hebrew traditions bears further noting in light of the general division disagreement evidenced in Ezekiel 40-48, J. W. Olley, 'Trajectories in Paragraphing of the Book of Ezekiel', in *Unit Delimitation in Biblical Hebrew and Northwest Semitic Literature* (ed. M.C.A. Korpel and J.M. Oesch; Pericope 4; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), 218-220.

²¹⁷Reading MT but emending 'law' to 'laws' in keeping with the plurals throughout v. 11. On the complexities of this verse, §4.2 above.

torah in v. 12 is as a global reality, a decree regarding the entirety of Yhwh's dwelling.²¹⁸ Verse 12 is a closing salvo that precisely focuses the textual lens onto holiness as a fundamental concern of the new era. So important is holiness that Yhwh calls it the law of the temple.

Remarkably, the basic standard for temple behaviour will be superlative holiness. While the phrase 'most holy' is not foreign to Ezekiel the extension of superlative holiness to the whole mountaintop, and even to the whole Zadokite territory (48:12), is a major innovation in the Hebrew Bible.²¹⁹ Here, however, it is not only one room (41:3-4) or some cultic articles (44:8) that Yhwh calls most holy.²²⁰ It is the whole temple complex, as indicated by the near redundancy 'all the borders, all around'. Everything concerned with the temple will be most holy. The recapitulation of the opening clause puts a poignant punch behind the assertion so that there will be no neglecting the central concern: with Yhwh as king, utter holiness is the incontrovertible law of his territory.

In order to facilitate the practical attainment or, better, maintenance, of his law, Yhwh provides a smattering of practical instructions in 43:13-48:35. As already seen, though, these directives pertain to a narrow sector of the restored Israel, focusing on practices in the temple precincts (e.g., 40:44-46, 45:10-17). After all, the phrase 'the entirety of the mountaintop' denotes only

²¹⁸ Cf. S. Talmon, 'Torah as a Concept and Vital Principle in the Hebrew Bible', *GOTR* 24 (1979): 280.

²¹⁹ R. Kasher, 'Anthropomorphism, Holiness and Cult: A New Look at Ezekiel 40-48', *ZAW* 110 (1998): 201-202. Though note S. Olyan, 'the expression ['most holy'] is used in a confusing and contradictory way in Ezekiel 40-48, in contrast to its precise use in the Priestly descriptions of the tabernacle,' *Rites*, 134-135, n.50.

²²⁰ Cf. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 229-230.

the temple-complex. At the same time, the equal distribution of land (48:1-7, 23-29) is also an important segment of these directives since land disbursal maintains holiness. Yhwh does not intend to isolate the law of the temple merely to the temple precincts.²²¹ The overarching agenda of Yhwh's reign is holiness. To grasp the extent of Yhwh's holy reign, an examination of the mountain itself is in order, providing a fitting conclusion to the exploration of Yhwh's kingship in Ezekiel 40-48.

5.4 The mountain city

While references to mountains are scattered throughout Ezekiel 1-39, three (17:22-24, 20:40, 34:14) bear special resemblance to the mountain of Ezekiel 40.²²² Each plausibly represents the mountain as Zion, not the physical landmark, but the larger-than-life site where Yhwh finalizes a programmatic act of salvation for his people, in keeping with longstanding tradition.²²³ As Shemaryahu Talmon puts it, 'Mount Zion, in its majestic height (if not geographically, at least in the minds of the devout), is seen to tower above all the other mountains of Canaan and the lands around it'.²²⁴ Yet,

²²¹ After all, the Zadokites must teach the people to distinguish profane and holy (44:23), and Levites must guard the temple (44:10-14).

²²² Levenson, *Theology*, 7; Rudnig, 'Ezechiel', 575. Levenson also identifies the mountain as Sinai, and numerous other scholars have followed, finding in Ezekiel a second Moses, e.g., Levitt-Kohn, *A New Heart*, 117 and Block, *Ezekiel*, 2.498-746 *passim*. Adequate response to this interpretation requires more than present space provides, except to note that a correspondence with Moses may be likely but cannot be as important as scholars have supposed if, as argued here, Yhwh's kingship is of ultimate significance.

²²³ R.J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (HSM 4; Cambridge: HUP, 1972), 159.

²²⁴ S. Talmon, 'Har and Midbār: An Antithetical Pair of Motifs in the Hebrew Bible', in *Figurative Language in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Mindlin, M.J. Geller, and J.E. Wansbrough; London: SOAS, 1987), 117-142.

paradoxically, neither Zion nor its geographical and theological synonym, Jerusalem, are explicitly named in Ezekiel's mountain passages.²²⁵ The mountain's identity, like many features of the book of Ezekiel, is shrouded in the fog of ambiguity; it is and is not Zion.²²⁶

As Zion, the mountain is Yhwh's traditional abode. The absence of a name, however, enables the theological mountain to tower above traditional expectations by positioning Yhwh as the cosmic king who rules from his exalted city. Here again Ezekiel's ambiguity complexifies and enriches the portrayal of Yhwh's kingship. As seen above (§2.4), the temple itself is a city. And in Ezekiel 40-48 this city (i.e., the temple) becomes the origin of all goodness for Israel on account of its royal occupant.²²⁷ By implication of the cosmic mountain motif, the temple-city also sources goodness for the whole created order.

While the mountain itself would have been sufficient for sourcing Yhwh's restoration of Israel,²²⁸ the merging of temple and city communicates the decidedly political bent of the restoration.²²⁹ Cult and king come together over the whole world, indicating that Yhwh's reign knows no boundaries.

²²⁵ Cf. T. Renz, 'The Use of the Zion Tradition in the Book of Ezekiel', in *Zion, City of our God* (ed R.S. Hess and G.J. Wenham. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 77-104.

²²⁶ Pace Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2.547.

²²⁷ Weinfeld's study of utopian expectations showed that Israel expected royal and cultic to fuse in one locale, 'Zion and Jerusalem', 93-115. Whatever Ezekiel's relationship to the tradition, he has clearly tapped into the larger hope of the king and the temple aligning in order to posit his own remarkable vision of a future in which the deity and the king are ontologically one.

²²⁸ Cf. Isa 2:2, 10:32. For Yhwh's abode as a 'holy mountain': Isa 11:9, 27:13, 66:20, Jer 31:23, Joel 2:1, Zech 8:3, Psa 3:5, 43:3.

²²⁹ The parallel passages of Ezekiel 17:22-24 and 20:40 also resonate with political overtones. Cf. Psa 48:2.

The cosmic king of Ezekiel 1 is the king of the mountain city in Ezekiel 40-48. Admittedly, the named recipients of Yhwh's kingly blessing are the citizens of restored Israel; the world at large even appears neglected, since the temple river terminates in the Dead Sea.²³⁰ But several passages in Ezekiel 1-39 confirm that Yhwh's reign is not limited geographically.

Although not named 'Jerusalem', the temple-city builds its otherworldly realities on the historic relationship between the temple, Mount Zion and Jerusalem. Thus, Jerusalem's cosmic significance informs the vision but with added intensity on account of its anonymity.²³¹ Ezekiel's mythic picture of Jerusalem appears first as Yhwh excoriates Jerusalem for outdoing her neighbours in evil: 'you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you' (5:7). But Yhwh's people have displeased their god not merely by the volume or heinousness of their sins. Worse, they have defied him by neglecting the purpose for which he 'placed them in the midst of the nations' (5:5), presumably to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exo 19:6) so that the nations would recognize the authority and splendour of Yhwh (Ezek 38:28, 39:27-28).²³² Here Yhwh is concerned with the geography of holiness, not Israel's physical location.²³³ As the expected exemplars of Yhwh's

²³⁰ K.P. Darr, 'The Wall around Paradise: Ezekielian Ideas about the Future', VT 37 (1987): 271-279. Cf. Block, 'Ezekiel's cartographic vision is extremely narrow', *Ezekiel*, 2.741.

²³¹ J. Galambush sees the absence of 'Jerusalem' as a final discarding of Lady Jerusalem (Ezekiel 16, 23), *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel The City as Yahweh's Wife* (SBLDS 130; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 148-163. But this reading risks missing the cosmic import by over-reading the personification of Jerusalem.

²³² Pace S. Talmon 'הר *har*', TDOT, 438 (427-447).

²³³ More thoroughly, R.P. Gordon, *Holy Land, Holy City: Sacred Geography and the Interpretation of the Bible* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004).

holiness, Israel occupied a central place in the world, even if not on its maps.²³⁴ Again, the boundary between suprahistorical and historical dims, if not disappears.

Yhwh's encounter with Gog also blurs this boundary, not least as Yhwh predicts Gog's attack on 'those who dwell at the centre of the earth' (38:12). Again, Jerusalem and Zion are not named, but, in locating all Israel at the 'centre of the earth', Yhwh surely includes the country's capital and holy place. The LXX translated the Hebrew *טבור* ('centre') as 'navel' (*ὀμφαλός*) leading some to see a Hebrew precursor to the later concept of 'navel of the earth' that dominated Greek thought.²³⁵ But, even if the extrabiblical notion of 'the navel of the earth' is absent, the mythic character of the Gog oracles loads the phrase 'centre of the earth' with a non-geographical, mythic vision of a cosmic enemy rampaging against the people of the cosmic king.²³⁶ These people and their location at the 'centre of the earth' are tinged with a universality that transfers to the seat of the king's power, that is, the temple-city that opens and sets the tone for the vision of Ezekiel 40-48.²³⁷ As king, Yhwh plays universal not local politics.

²³⁴ Though later maps did locate Jerusalem at a geographical centre, P.S. Alexander, 'Jerusalem as the Omphalos of the World: On the History of a Geographical Concept', *Judaism* 46 (1997): 147-158.

²³⁵ The comparative religionist M. Eliade has explored the breadth of the concept, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (trans. P. Mairet; Princeton: Princeton University, 1991), 41-44. But S. Talmon rebuts attempts to assimilate the Hebrew Bible into the wider sea of religion in this issue, "The Navel of the Earth" and the Comparative Method', in *Scripture in History and Theology: Essays in honor of J. Coert Rylaarsdam* (ed. A. Merrill and T. Overholt; PTMS 17; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1977), 243-68.

²³⁶ Cf. Bodi, *Poem of Erra*, 219-226.

²³⁷ With Alexander, 'Jerusalem', 149, Talmon dissents, 'הר *har*', 437-440. But DCH, 3.339 and HALOT, 2.367 recognize connotations of cosmic centrality in *טבור*.

Chapter 7—The Fullness of Kingship

Another indication of a universal scope is the link between the ‘very high mountain’ (40:2) and the ‘high and lofty mountain’ where Yhwh promises to plant the seedling that will become a great tree (17:22-24), towering above all other trees.²³⁸ The seedling represents a Davidic leader who will transcend expectations for Judah’s political future by becoming the source of Yhwh’s universal blessing—‘every type of bird will dwell under it’ (v. 23). No other tree will compete with Yhwh’s seedling, not least because Yhwh himself tends the seedling in his own realm, far above the machinations of lesser political powers. As the location of universal blessing, the mountain is suprahistorical, and as the site of Yhwh’s intervention in the human political sphere, the mountain is the home of Yhwh’s own royal dealings.

The point of this imagery is not to depict an actual geographical feature but to present Yhwh’s chosen leader as exalted on account of his relationship with Yhwh. And the extraordinary mountain is the vehicle for this political positioning. What is more, Yhwh explains the purpose of this grand horticulture as the recognition that he has ‘lowered the high tree and made high the low tree...’ (v. 24), implying that Yhwh’s project is political validation of himself.²³⁹ Just as Ezekiel 17 depicts Nebuchadnezzar using Zedekiah for political gain, Yhwh employs all kings (the trees) in order to position himself as the supreme king. Even the royal seedling is Yhwh’s tool for self-exaltation. Importantly, though, the seedling only becomes a tree testifying to Yhwh’s grandeur because Yhwh himself has tended it on the

²³⁸ Levenson, *Theology*, 7.

²³⁹ The picture of comprehensive subservience to Yhwh speaks against identifying the figures denoted by ‘all the trees of the field’. But they are certainly royal figures, not unlike the Assyrian tree that meets decay on account of Yhwh’s might (Cf. Chapter 8, §5.2).

towering mountain. The seedling is Yhwh's chosen deputy who facilitates universal well-being, entirely like the Davidic *nāšî'* of Ezekiel 34 and 37.²⁴⁰

The mountain of Ezekiel 40-48 is also a royal domain, housing Yhwh's abode and sourcing the benevolence he has guaranteed for his restored nation. As just seen, the mountaintop location of Yhwh's kingship also indicates the universal scope of his reign. The 'very high mountain' positions Yhwh as a global king because this mountain is at the centre of the earth. From Yhwh's mountain all goodness proceeds to Israel, but, by implication, also to the whole earth, since it is from this mountain that Yhwh will plant the seedling, presumably the *nāšî'*. From this mountain 'all the trees of the field' will recognize Yhwh as supreme, and 'every type of bird' will enjoy its protection. From this mountain, Yhwh is king over all things, to Israel first but also to the world.²⁴¹

Conclusion

Ezekiel 40-48 depict the fullness of Yhwh's kingship. Here the earlier promises and themes of Yhwh's kingship find breadth of expression. Among others, Levenson has subtly noted Yhwh's kingship as a key theme to Ezekiel's final vision.²⁴² This chapter has showed further that Yhwh's kingship is the fundamental and organizing force of Ezekiel 40-48. The visional temple exists as his abode, and the land distribution occurs at his command. The royal figure of the *nāšî'* and the cultic officials fall under his aegis, as does all

²⁴⁰ Cf. A. Laato, *Josiah and David Redivivus: The Historical Josiah and the Messianic Expectations of Exilic and Postexilic Times* (ConBOT 33; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1992), 154-164.

²⁴¹ Lang may be correct that Ezekiel is 'more interested in the politics of Judah than in the design of a pacifist world-utopia', *Kein Aufstand*, 185. But, as seen above, Ezekiel does not neglect the rest of the world.

²⁴² Levenson, *Theology*, 75-100.

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of Israel. Indeed Israel exists as a unified national entity because Yhwh himself reconstituted her, and, although the *nāšî'* evokes memories of Israel's monarchy, the juxtaposition of the title *nāšî'* with Yhwh's own declared royalty suggests that the *nāšî'*'s royalty is overwhelmed by the deity-king who looms across the vision. The theme of Yhwh's kingship intrudes even into the giving of law so commonly thought to be the centrepiece of Ezekiel 40-48. However, with Yhwh's kingship as the true focal point, the legal material of the vision is not an updated Mosaic code given from deity to prophet but a royal agenda couched in legal jargon and dictated to a trusted scribe.

In light of these royal functions, the political value of Yhwh's kingship appears far more than metaphorical. The final vision of Ezekiel sees Yhwh engaged in the public exercise and legitimation of power even from the deity-king's first words; 'the place of the soles of my feet' (43:7) orients Yhwh's kingship to the exercise of authority, a fundamentally political act. Rooke is thus only partly correct in stating that the *nāšî'* is 'the most important figure of government'.²⁴³ He might be the primary *human* figure of government. But Yhwh supersedes him as the supreme power holder, flooding the new Israel and indeed the world with his beneficence.

²⁴³ Rooke, *Zadok's Heirs*, 119.

CHAPTER 8—YHWH'S PERVASIVE KINGSHIP (TRACING THE THEME)

1. Introduction

This chapter provides final glimpses at Ezekiel's presentation of Yhwh's kingship. As first noted in Chapter 3, Yhwh's kingship is like a stone that sends ripples across a calm lake. Five times throughout the book of Ezekiel the ripples emanate from overt instances of Yhwh's kingship. The dazzling thrones in Ezekiel 1 and 10 presented Yhwh as a transcendent king bent on subduing his rebellious people, a theme expanded in Yhwh's declaration 'I will be king' (20:33). In Ezekiel 34, the benevolence of his rule emerged as he promised to supplant human rulers in order to become the sole shepherd (king) of Israel, and, as seen in the previous chapter, the fullness of his kingship is limitless.

This chapter, then, considers how these five loci of kingship eject royal ripples into the whole of Ezekiel. Or, to use another image, Chapters 3-7 create a spotlight which Chapter 8 now turns back onto the remainder of Ezekiel in an effort to see how Yhwh's kingship lingers in unexpected textual corners. As before, the interest is not merely in identifying evidences of Yhwh's kingship but in exploring how they depict the political status of Yhwh's kingship. In order to avoid the tedium of considering each chapter consecutively, four broad categories provide a framework for what follows: 1) authority, 2) Israel's leaders, 3) legal material and 4) foreign powers.

2. Authority

The vision of Ezekiel 8-11 is notable for its depiction of Yhwh suppressing rebellion with overwhelming power, and a brisk tour of Ezekiel shows that Yhwh's military might against his people is a common theme throughout the

book. In the light of kingship, the military might is further evidence that Yhwh as deity-king dominates the book of Ezekiel, not merely as a metaphor but as intimately engaged in the public exercise and legitimation of power, that is, politics.

2.1 The people

As discussed earlier, rebellion is inherently political because rebellion is the rejection of authority.¹ Introduced in the prophet's first vision, the theme of rebellion recurs in 12:2-3, pointing to the political relationship between Yhwh and the people.² In these two verses, Yhwh employs a triple reference to the 'rebellious house', instructing the prophet to model the process of entering exile by carrying baggage. Here, as in the first vision, the theme of rebellion occurs only in speech from king to prophet.

At the end of Ezekiel 12, however, Yhwh addresses the mutineers directly, for, in denouncing Yhwh's capacity to direct their lives (12:22), the people have rejected his kingship. His authority and identity are at stake. Thus he announces, 'Because I am Yhwh, I will speak the word that I will speak and it will be done...O rebellious house, I will speak the word and I will do it'(12:25).³ Here Yhwh reasserts his identity: 'I am Yhwh'. Of course, the

¹ See above, Chapter 3, §5.

² Pace Eichrodt's representative opinion that the prophet is primarily concerned with a spiritual revivification, *Ezekiel*, 150. To be sure, there is a spiritual component, but here it is absorbed by the overarching concern to develop loyalty for Yhwh. Cf. 12:9

³ This sentence, like v. 28, raises syntactical puzzles. Cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 1.279-280, and Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 1.228. Even though the phrase כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה opens a sentence only here in Ezekiel this phrase should not be assimilated into the following but should stand alone since the verb אֲדַבֵּר ('I will speak') is finite. Isa 61:8 also opens with כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה but precedes a participle for

affirmation 'I am Yhwh' assumes that the people know what his identity entails. As noted numerous times throughout this study, Yhwh's identity is multifaceted, but, according to Ezekiel, no predicate more aptly applies to Yhwh than 'king'.⁴ Yhwh is the god of Israel, and the god of Israel is king. Deity and kingship are tautologically intertwined for Ezekiel. And, juxtaposed with the repeated accusations of Israel's rebellion, the statement of identity, 'I am Yhwh' subtly affirms this.⁵ Israel spurned Yhwh's authority by assuming his impotence (v. 22), but, Yhwh's repetition of 'speak' and 'do' in v. 25 underscores that the rebellious house has miscalculated. Yhwh speaks with authority because he is the king.

The deity-king again notes the rebellion of his people in 17:12, and again the crux of Yhwh's concern lies in the people's rejection of his authority. In Ezekiel 17, Yhwh uses the moniker 'rebellious house' to allege that his people have discarded his rule by attempting to shake off their vassalage to Babylon; rebellion against established political regimes is tantamount to rebellion against Yhwh himself. Not surprisingly, then, given other encounters with Yhwh's kingship, the bold implication here is that

which 'Yhwh' becomes the substantive. Here, then, the unusual Ezekielian syntax highlights the assertion of Yhwh's identity.

⁴ Here going beyond W. Zimmerli's important work, 'Knowledge of God according to the Book of Ezekiel', in *I Am Yahweh* (ed. W. Brueggemann; trans. D.W. Stott; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 29-98. Zimmerli noted that recognition of Yhwh's identity was borne by his actions but denied an overarching concept that explained Yhwh's actions. Yhwh's kingship is that concept.

⁵ J.B. Wells helpfully explains 'I am Yhwh' as fundamentally a statement about Yhwh's holiness, *God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (JSOTSup 305; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 168-184. But she neglects a further link to Yhwh's kingship, the most basic matter in the book of Ezekiel

Yhwh's royal authority extends beyond the expected sphere of cultic activity and into the overtly political world of international affairs.

Yhwh's interest in the political sphere emerges in a final threat to the rebels (24:3).⁶ Here Yhwh condemns Jerusalem's elite, upending the political realm that has perpetrated injustice upon his people (cf. Ezekiel 34). To set the stage, Yhwh spins a tale of a stew pot laden with the finest cuts of meat (vv. 4-5).⁷ Jerusalem, the seat of royalty and the womb of leadership, is the pot; the meat is Israel's finest. But, as Yhwh continues, he twists the imagery to reveal that the meat in the pot is unfit for eating (v. 6). It is ordinary at best.⁸ The exalted denizens of Jerusalem—'the rebellious house'—have corrupted the once-treasured city, and the whole lot will face extermination in an overheated fire. Yhwh thus confirms that he has no truck with a political establishment that contravenes his authority. Rebels against the divine king receive capital punishment for their treason.⁹

2.2 The sword

If the 'rebel' motif speaks to a political relationship between Yhwh and his people, the antidote for rebellion also cloaks Yhwh's authority within the

⁶ That is, aside from the passages already discussed—Ezekiel 1-5, 20, 40-48.

⁷ Whether these verses reflect a sign-act that Ezekiel performed or merely a graphic illustration is immaterial to appreciating Yhwh's critique of political powers. L. Allen conjectures that Nebuchadnezzar is the unnamed figure whom Yhwh instructs to cook the stew, 'Ezekiel 24:3-14: A Rhetorical Perspective', *CBQ* 49 (1987): 405. This suggestion attractively solves the riddle of the singular verbs and deepens the political intrigue.

⁸ Block, *Ezekiel*, I.778.

⁹ Developing this theme in relation to Deuteronomy, R.C. Barrett, *Disloyalty and Destruction: Religion and Politics in Deuteronomy and the Modern World* (LHBOTS 511; New York: T&T Clark, 2009).

king's robe. Already the prophet's inaugural vision revealed the glint of Yhwh's sword, and the response to the temple abominations in Ezekiel 9 showcased the military might of the deity king. But punishment for treason against Yhwh is sprinkled throughout the book of Ezekiel.

Like a dominant king, Yhwh favours the sword as his weapon of choice. Ezekiel provides brief evidence that the sword is a royal emblem.¹⁰ In 30:21-26, Yhwh will disarm Pharaoh of his sword by breaking his arms. In turn, Yhwh will present his own sword to Nebuchadnezzar, thereby strengthening Nebuchadnezzar's arms. The interplay is most cohesive if Yhwh, like the Egyptian and Babylonian leaders, is a king and the sword is emblematic of the king's military prowess.¹¹ In this context, a relief of Rameses III (1192-1160) is notable for representing the Egyptian king with a sword rather than the mace common to earlier periods. The sword had 'became the symbol of Pharaonic authority'.¹² Also suggestive is the king's debasement in the Babylonian *akitu* festival; emblematic of his kingship he lays aside his crown, sceptre, ring and blade.¹³

¹⁰ As noted earlier, חֶרֶב most commonly refers to a long weapon of war, a sword, and far less commonly to shorter instruments, Kaiser, 'חֶרֶב—hereb', 5.155-165.

¹¹ Cf. Hoffmeier, 'Arm of God', 384.

¹² Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in the Light of Archaeological Discovery* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), 79. For the relief of Rameses, p. 350.

¹³ H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1948), 318-320. Of course, both the Egyptian and Babylonian evidence noted here is suggestive but is in no way a claim to thematic borrowing.

Chapter 8—Yhwh's Pervasive Kingship

The suitability of a sword for a warrior king also turns up in the death scene of King Saul, as the narrative underscores that Saul fell upon his own sword rather than his armour-bearer's (1 Sam 31:4). An earlier episode equally focused on Saul's sword, as, fearing Goliath, he offered his sword to David (1 Samuel 17). But, just as Yhwh rejected Saul as king (1 Samuel 15), the literary artistry of 1 Samuel casts David as the anti-Saul by having him reject Saul's sword (1 Sam 17:39). As is well-known, David then employs a sling and stone to defeat Goliath, subtly showing the impotence of the king's sword and thus of the king himself. The sword represents the king.¹⁴

As a royal ripple in Ezekiel 1-5, the sign-act of 5:1-4 and its interpretation in the following verses intimates Yhwh's prowess with the sword. But, as with most things Ezekielian, a single instance hardly suffices to make the prophet's point. In Ezekiel 6 the oracle against Israel's topography opens with Yhwh's declaration, 'Behold I, even I, am bringing a sword against you' (v. 3). Here, unencumbered by the sign-act motif, the deity-king wields the sword with power. The repeated pronoun 'I' enables Yhwh to own the attack, and, as the king whom the prophet beheld glimmering upon the mysterious throne, Yhwh here portrays himself specifically as a warring king.

Indeed, his swordsmanship will result in a recognition of his identity (vv. 7, 10, 13, 14). By inference, then, the sword communicates something of Yhwh's identity, namely, his royalty. Not surprisingly, then, the sword also

¹⁴1 Sam 13:19-22 recalls that Philistine oppression eliminated blacksmiths lest the Israelites make swords. But, perhaps owing to their royal status, Saul and Jonathan had them when battle dawned. A contrast the narrative makes nicely by repeating the verb 'to be found' (נמצא) when a simpler syntax would have sufficed.

features as the deity-king's means for threatening Judah's political leader, Zedekiah (12:14-16). While Yhwh claims responsibility for all three calamities in the tripartite attack, the role of the sword, as would befit a king, features most prominently, indicated by the additional phrase 'I will unsheathe the sword after you' (v. 15).

A passage thematically parallel to Ezekiel 6 provides the sharpest presentation of Yhwh as a sword-wielding king.¹⁵ In Ezek 21:6-22 Yhwh again promises to draw his sword, but in contrast to Ezekiel 6, here both guilty and innocent will feel the bite of the blade (v. 8) as Yhwh pursues a wholesale retribution for the corruption that has marked his land. Yhwh's deepened fury raises the rhetorical register of this pericope nearly to a frenzy. Yhwh speaks in superlative terms, naming his battle as against 'all flesh' (v. 9), claiming that 'all flesh' will know him as Yhwh (v. 10), and warning of universal timidity in view of his power.¹⁶ Yet, as in Ezekiel 12, Yhwh narrows his fury to the political establishment (v. 17).

Singling out the political leaders underscores that their elevated societal position does not exempt them from Yhwh's punishment. The implication, then, is that Yhwh is a superior authority. Further, while the

¹⁵ Since Yhwh is Israel's god, S. Terrien understandably claims that the depiction of Yhwh evokes the theme of divine warrior theophany common to the Hebrew Bible and its wider literary world, 'Ezekiel's Dance of the Sword and Prophetic Theonomy', in *Gift of God in Due Season: Essays on Scripture and Community in Honor of James A. Sanders* (ed. D.M. Carr, J.A. Sanders, and R.D. Weiss; JSOTSup 303; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 122. But read within the larger scope of Ezekiel, Yhwh's divinity recedes from centre stage. Even the oracle here neglects emphases of Yhwh's divinity, focusing instead on Yhwh's zeal and capacity to wreak vengeance with the sword, a rather kingly activity.

¹⁶ Verse 12 employs כָּל ('all, every') four times to underscore the scope of Yhwh's strength.

universal language of the oracle unmistakably includes the leaders, they deserve special mention (as v. 17) because their failure to uphold Yhwh's authority is partially responsible for their imminent demise (cf. Chapter 6, §2). So, even though the final jab at the people is all-inclusive—'I have set the sword against all their gates' (v. 20), the attack on the urban centres cuts more deeply against the leaders because their remit as political powers includes protecting the gates.¹⁷

The sword oracle of Ezekiel 21 is thus a double-edged boon to Yhwh's kingship. Not only does Yhwh yet again display his military might, but he singles out renegade leaders as worthy of punishment. Yhwh the king is mighty, as he demonstrates by subduing his enemies, particularly those who precipitate rebellion against him. And the sword is a primary vehicle to display his royal authority.

3. Israel's leaders

Building on Duguid's laudable treatment of the topic, the previous chapters showed how Yhwh's royal identity forced a collision with human political forces in order to exalt Yhwh. But, some lacunae remain, and filling them will deepen the picture of Yhwh's kingship.

3.1 Royal leaders

Among other scattered references, four sustained passages pit Yhwh against the royal leaders of his people.¹⁸ 1) In Ezekiel 12, the prophet's staging of Judah's captivity included a depiction of 'the *nāšî*' in Jerusalem' (v. 10), showing that Yhwh's judgment would fall upon all strata of society. However, as noted

¹⁷ Cf. the gates in the final vision as discussed in Chapter 7, §2.4.

¹⁸ Only three feature here, since Ezekiel 21 was discussed in section 2.1 above.

above, Yhwh isolates the *nāšî'* for special threat; Zedekiah, will face an authority greater than the Babylonian monarch to whom he owed his political position.¹⁹ Thus, while Nebuchadnezzar will be the human instrument for Zedekiah's downfall, Yhwh claims the pending victory as his own, announcing that he himself will attack Zedekiah with the sword. Yet, unlike Ezekiel 17 which it prefigures, Ezekiel 12 offers little rationale for Zedekiah's downfall. So, reading Ezekiel 12 on its own merits, this critique of the *nāšî'* demonstrates Yhwh's superiority as a royal leader for his people.²⁰ The absence of explanatory details draws attention to the stark contrast between the impotent *nāšî'* and the unstoppable Yhwh, a royal leader of greater capacity and merit than Zedekiah.

2) Ezekiel 17 couches the critique of Zedekiah in a parable about trees and eagles.²¹ Zedekiah receives Yhwh's reprimand for attempting to form an alliance with Egypt that would enable Judah to secede from Babylon, and Yhwh's perspective on Zedekiah's attempted coup is unmistakable, 'As I live,

¹⁹The Hebrew Bible details Zedekiah's reign and relations in 2 Kgs 24:17-25:7. On Nebuchadnezzar's role in Judah's politics, see recently R.H. Sack, 'Nebuchadnezzar II and the Old Testament: History versus Ideology', in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 221-234.

²⁰Yhwh's speech gives little indication that 'the original intention was to destroy false hopes' of freedom from Babylon, as Hals supposes (*Ezekiel*, 78). Such a conclusion is, at best, derivative. More satisfactorily, the text poses Yhwh supreme, with minimal interest in eliminating hope. The point, rather, seems to be establishing Yhwh's superiority.

²¹On the power of imagery in this parable, H. Simian-Yofre, 'Ez 17,1-10 como enigma y parabola', *Bib* 65 (1984): 27-43.

it is my oath that he despised and my covenant that he broke' (v. 19).²² Some scholars have construed this political intrigue as the prophet Ezekiel's acquiescence to Babylon. Gottwald, for example, concludes that Ezekiel operates with 'an essentially favourable attitude toward Babylonia' and even that the prophet expected 'the patronage and protection of a still enlightened Babylonian world empire'.²³

But the tenor of Ezekiel 17, let alone the whole book, suggests that Ezekiel's full allegiance belonged to the one whom he deemed the cosmic king, Yhwh. Further, Yhwh promises not only retribution upon Zedekiah (vv. 19-21) but resurrection of Judah's political fortunes (vv. 22-24). If the oracle here were merely a tacit support of Babylon, the bright future promised in vv. 22-24 would be less politically charged, perhaps even less relevant. What is more, the inaugural vision has already depicted Yhwh as supreme monarch; his appearance to the prophet on the Mesopotamian plain was inflammatory. In transcending national borders, Yhwh was trespassing on Marduk's territory, even usurping the Babylonian god's domain, and, in assuming a throne, Yhwh was challenging the great king, Nebuchadnezzar, for possession of his captives.²⁴ A final indication of Ezekiel's political loyalties lingers in Ezekiel 21:23-28. Having celebrated his own skill with the sword,

²² But M. Greenberg offers a worthy alternative perspective on this covenant, 'Ezekiel 17: A Holistic Interpretation', *JAOS* 103 (1983): 152-153.

²³ N.K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International Relations in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 302, 329.

²⁴ Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 101-147.

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Yhwh again subtly asserts unbounded political power, extending his claim beyond national Israel, 'Son of man, mark two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to come' (v. 24). Depicting Nebuchadnezzar as Yhwh's pawn hardly seems the way for Ezekiel to communicate loyalty to Babylon, nor does the veiled threat against Babylon in 21:35-37.²⁵

Returning to Ezekiel 17, then, Zedekiah's disloyalty to Babylon deserves judgment but only because Nebuchadnezzar is a vassal of a still more fearsome king, Yhwh.²⁶ Not surprisingly, then, Yhwh concludes the retribution (vv. 16-21) and restoration (vv. 22-24) segments of Ezekiel 17 by affirming his own identity ('I am Yhwh'). Neither Zedekiah nor Nebuchadnezzar is the supreme monarch; only Yhwh.²⁷

3) Ezekiel 19 returns Yhwh's interest squarely to Judean soil with a poetic satire of Judah's royalty. Though the word 'lament' frames the poem (vv. 1, 14), Block is surely correct to see a mockery of the dethroned Judean monarchs rather than real disappointment. Its editorial placement suggests that Ezekiel 19 negatively illustrates the excursus on righteous behaviour in

²⁵ Cf. M. Greenberg, 'Nebuchadnezzar and the Parting of the Ways: Ezek. 21:26-27', in *Ah, Assyria...: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayyim Tadmor* (ed. M. Cogan and I. Eph'al; ScrHier 33; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 267-71.

²⁶ Mein provides valuable reflection on the prophet's political leanings as exposed both here and in Ezekiel 19, *Ethics of Exile*, 87-94.

²⁷ In cataloguing prophetic critique of Babylon, D.J. Reimer observes that 'anti-Babylonian material is completely lacking in the book of Ezekiel' (267), *Oracles against Babylon*, 267-282. Cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 1.448, 2.304. Acknowledging the absence of overt critique, however, does not invalidate seeing tacit resistance to Babylon as an implication of Yhwh's kingship.

Ezekiel 18; the princes of Judah are the wicked who will die (18:13, 20, 26).²⁸

Further, regret for monarchical failings has been wholly absent throughout the book, while, to the contrary, eagerness bordering on glibness has marked Yhwh's encounters with the monarchy.²⁹ For example, following the dramatic cry, 'Forge a chain!' (7:23), Yhwh observes that the royal house is distraught (v. 27). His response is laconic, affirming that judgment will renew an understanding of his identity. So, reading Ezekiel 19 as derision rather than true lament has ample precedent in the book, and, what is more, a mockery of the princes comports with Yhwh's own agenda to present his own kingship as superior.

The specific identities of the lions predictably garner mixed opinion. The first, no doubt is Jehoahaz, since he was incarcerated in Egypt (2 Kgs 23:31-34). The second could be Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin or Zedekiah.³⁰ But, the historical particulars of the lions are less important than their characterization and their broad identity as the erstwhile leaders of Yhwh's people.³¹ And here arises yet another reason to hear Ezekiel 19 as a satire that subtly exalts Yhwh: Israel's past kings, depicted in vv. 2-9 as restless lions, are 'mourned' not for their excellencies but for their decadence and the destruction they

²⁸ Block, *Ezekiel*, 1:594-95.

²⁹ Yhwh limits his remorse to the fate of the people as a whole, e.g., 6:9, but the royal leadership consistently receives a resounding rejection, as also in 22:6.

³⁰ Surveying the arguments, C.T. Begg, 'The Identity of the Princes in Ezekiel 19: Some Reflections', *ETL* 65 (1989): 358-369.

³¹ Cf. B.A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger Than a Lion?: Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (OBO 212; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005), 231-277.

sowed and reaped. They 'devoured men' (v. 3, 6); even widows were not safe (v. 7).³² As retribution, the first was hunted and exported to Egypt, while the second drew hunters from 'the nations from the surrounding provinces' before meeting his demise in Babylon.³³

In 19:10-14 the sham lament continues by reverting to its opening character, the mother of the lions (v. 2), and introducing a new image—the vine. Although these verses evaluate individual political figures, the overarching concern is to signal the death of political Judah and thus the end of her dynasty. Read in concert with Yhwh's kingship, the lament for the vine is another a vehicle for the great king to flex his political muscle by mocking the downfall of his rebellious subjects.³⁴ In this way, Yhwh anticipates the elimination of key obstacles to full recognition of his kingship. And, equally, the path opens for the installation of the human leader who will facilitate Yhwh's kingship.

3.2 Other leaders

Earlier chapters have already explored Yhwh's castigation of non-royal leaders, noting that the legitimacy of Yhwh's leadership gains support as he

³² Zimmerli's perspective (*Ezekiel*, 1.394) that these violent actions are commonplace for ancient Near Eastern kings rather misses the point, since Yhwh still excoriates the lions for them. If anything, Zimmerli reinforces the argument here: Yhwh is overturning the royal establishment.

³³ There is no need to follow Block (*Ezekiel*, 1.605) in supposing that the report of Jehoiakim's subservience to Nebuchadnezzar is a 'pro-Babylonian' assertion anymore than the notice that Jehoiakin was captured indicates anti-Davidide sentiment. The rhetoric in 19:9 tells against Jehoiakim but is ambiguous regarding international politics.

³⁴ In Ezek 21:30-32, the demise of Zedekiah and his society is calculated to this end as well. Yhwh's sword will create sweeping change, inverting the social order as a sign that his power outstrips the rebels. And, since Nebuchadnezzar brings the change at Yhwh's command, Yhwh's authority clearly surpasses even that of the ancient Near East's supreme king.

dismantles Israel's ruling classes, including her priests. Prophet, priest, and elder are impotent against Yhwh's might (7:25-26), and, along with the people of the land, they have defied his authority by spreading contradiction to his laws (22:24-31).³⁵ Their downfall is warranted as punishment for treason and necessary in order to secure widespread loyalty to Yhwh.

The new society depicted in Ezekiel 40-48 reinstates the priests, in spite of their 'violence' (22:26), but prophets are absent, perhaps, as Duguid avers, because the severity of their crimes merited elimination of their office.³⁶ Notably, in Ezekiel 13 the prophets (both male and female) receive a lengthy condemnation focused exclusively on their treachery, whereas the priests escape a similar diatribe. The burden of Yhwh's word against the prophets is that they have misrepresented reality, pretending to speak for him but portraying their own version of Judah's future. Of course, a false message from the prophets damages the relationship between Yhwh and his people. Yhwh thus promises 'I will deliver my people from your hand' (v. 23), effectively stripping authority from the prophetic guild and confirms that he alone governs his people. After all, Yhwh is king, and he shall ensure that the disloyal prophets and prophetesses never equivocate his identity again (vv. 14, 23). They shall know that he is king.

4. Legal material

As seen in Chapter 7, the towering vision of Ezekiel 40-48 presents Yhwh as a king intent on conforming his people to his ways. As their lawgiver, he

³⁵ Identifying the 'people of the land' has been a perennial challenge for Ezekiel scholars, but Duguid offers a judicious assessment, *Leaders of Israel*, 119-121.

³⁶ Duguid, *Leaders of Israel*, 105-108.

declares holiness the law of the land and establishes behavioural protocols to orient them to life in the new society. While Yhwh's 'law of the temple' (43:12) is an innovation for its declaration of superlative holiness, it is wholly expected given the legal material that litters Ezekiel 1-39. When read in light of Yhwh's kingship, these numerous terms point beyond the obvious links to cultic matters and back to the lawgiver, providing yet another indication that, to Ezekiel, Yhwh's kingship is no figurative trope but is the centre of Israel's existence.

4.1 An overview³⁷

Yhwh's legal standards first appear in Ezekiel 5 as the object of the people's rebellion (vv. 6-7). The key concern is that Yhwh's authority, embodied in his 'statutes' (חֻקִּים) and 'rules' (מִשְׁפָּטִים), have received short shrift.³⁸ The political dimension pushes to the fore in light of Yhwh's charge that Jerusalem's rebellion outstrips her neighbours' (vv. 6-7), since Yhwh implies both that the surrounding nations are his subjects and he focuses his frustration with Jerusalem on their failure to accept his claim on their behaviour. What is more, a key impetus for the promised retribution is to provide a warning to Jerusalem's political neighbours, presumably to deflate any notions of a similar coup (vv. 14-15). Though understated, a reasonable inference is that

³⁷ To be clear, while Yhwh frequently gives commands, especially to the prophet Ezekiel, the interest here is specifically legal terminology that shows up a political element in Yhwh's interaction with his people. Further, since this chapter only sketches the royal ripples caused by the five overt instances of Yhwh's kingship, M. Dijkstra's important insight into legal language in Ezekiel 7 is neglected, 'Legal Irrevocability (*lō' yāšūb*) in Ezekiel 7:13', *JSOT* 43 (1989): 109-116.

³⁸ Although Yhwh mentions the people's 'abominations' and 'detestable things', a catalogue of specific offenses is absent, suggesting that the burden of the passage is not the nature of the infractions themselves but the violation of Yhwh's statutes.

Jerusalem would have shown herself loyal to Yhwh precisely by obeying the statutes and rules that she has disregarded.

As a discourse on Yhwh's justice, Ezekiel 18 showcases the royal legislation, several times employing 'statute' and 'rule'. However, unlike in Ezekiel 5, cultic concerns are more overt here, with mention of idolatrous practices such as 'eating upon the mountains' (vv. 6, 11, 15) and 'worshipping the idols' (vv. 6, 12, 15). As seen especially in Ezekiel 8-11, non-Yahwistic religious practices constitute treason against Yhwh. The contrast between the righteous and the wicked person occupies Yhwh's chief interest, suggesting that the now-familiar ambiguity between Yhwh's religious and political personas here strains toward the religious. Yet, as seen earlier, 'righteousness' (צדקה) and its derivatives form a lexical family amicable to political connotations.³⁹ The complexity of Yhwh's identity requires that even these primarily religious components of his law are freighted with political import.

What is more, the majority of practices that Yhwh upholds as demonstrating loyalty occur in the public square: mercy towards the downtrodden, generosity to the poor, financial integrity, promotion of justice. And, particularly apropos here, behaviour that earns life is summarized as both 'doing justice and righteousness' and 'guarding and performing my statutes' (v. 19). Those who accept his dictates will live; those who rebel will die. In other words, Yhwh's justice amounts to rewarding or punishing

³⁹ Chapter 6, §3.3. For thorough treatment, G. Matties, *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse* (SBLDS 126; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990).

loyalty to the lawgiver, a wholly political perspective on the relationship between Yhwh and his people that derives from Ezekiel's fundamental premise that Yhwh is king.

4.2 'Bad' laws

Ezekiel 20 has already featured as a major plank supporting Yhwh's kingship, but the earlier investigations postponed consideration of the abundant legal references. By sheer volume of legal terminology, Ezekiel 20 deserves attention: 'statute' (חֻקָּה and חֻק) and 'rule' (מִשְׁפָּט) occur eight times each. Aligning with his role as lawgiver in Ezekiel 40-48, here Yhwh unequivocally owns the legal material as 'my statutes', 'my rules' (v. 11).⁴⁰ Underscoring their political connotations, they occur in context of Yhwh's most explicitly royal affirmation: 'I will reign as king over you' (v. 33). Again, the cultic dimension is not absent, but it is muted by the strong strains of overtly political characterization that marks Yhwh's interactions with his people. Ezekiel views Yhwh's kingship as legitimate and definitive.

Although crucial for developing Yhwh's kingship, the legal material of Ezekiel 20 has garnered scholarly attention for the so-called 'bad laws' that Yhwh decreed for a previous generation of his people: 'I gave them statutes (חֻקָּה) that were not good and rules that were not life-giving for them' (v. 25). Numerous proposals purport to resolve the felt difficulty of accepting that Yhwh burdened his people with impossible legal provisions, but consensus still eludes scholars.⁴¹ Scott Hahn and John Bergsma recently argued that,

⁴⁰ A reprise of the previous chapter's support for reading law promulgation as a royal exercise is unnecessary. See Chapter 7, §5.1.

⁴¹ Block analyzes over half a dozen and adds his own, *Ezekiel*, 1.639-41.

rooted in Priestly tradition, here Ezekiel advances a polemic against the competing perspectives of the Deuteronomic school.⁴² And Kelvin Friebe developed a fresh grammatical analysis of the key terms in order to relieve Yhwh's culpability.⁴³ Nevertheless, although studied, these proposals neglect to explain the 'bad laws' in light of the political dynamic at the core of Ezekiel 20.

Attempting to reconcile the unsettling theological implications is presently of less value than grappling with their place in Ezekiel's portrayal of Yhwh as the supreme ruler for national Israel. Block comes closest to this goal, observing that here Ezekiel restates the foundational conviction that 'Yhwh retains full authority to determine [Israel's] destiny and to achieve that goal by whatever means he chooses'.⁴⁴ With the 'bad laws' Yhwh endeavoured to inscribe his power upon his people's hearts of stone, demonstrating to them the severity of their rebellion. Halperin rightly links 20:25-26 with other portions of Ezekiel that present Yhwh as loftily superior to his people, but labelling Yhwh a 'monster of cruelty and hypocrisy' who

⁴² S. Hahn and J.S. Bergsma, 'What Laws Were "Not Good"?: A Canonical Approach to the Theological Problem of Ezekiel 20:25-26', *JBL* 123 (2004): 201-218.

⁴³ K.G. Friebe, 'The Decrees of Yahweh that Are Not Good: Ezekiel 20:25-26', in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday* (ed. R.L. Troxel, K.G. Friebe, and D.R. Magary; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 21-36.

⁴⁴ Block, *Ezekiel*, 1.641.

eschews 'the most elementary compassion or decency' reads against the grain of Ezekiel 20, and, for that matter, the whole of the book.⁴⁵

Modern readers understandably find Ezekiel's Yhwh unsettling, if not horrifying, but there is no reason to believe that earlier readers of Ezekiel would have responded otherwise. Yhwh is no avuncular deity. From start to finish, Ezekiel portrays him as an exalted monarch to whom even Nebuchadnezzar is a political pawn. Ezekiel's Yhwh exudes uncontested sovereignty, but terming this 'cruelty' oversteps the line from historical study of the Hebrew Bible to ethical evaluation of it. The one trades in accepted academic practice, the other in personal opinion. Regardless, Ezekiel 20 with its abundant legal material deepens Ezekiel's royal depiction of Yhwh by characterizing him still further as the sole figure who directs the life of corporate Israel.

5. Foreign powers

A final set of royal ripples appears in Yhwh's status as king vis-à-vis political powers beyond Israel's borders. Ezekiel 1 laid the groundwork for understanding Yhwh's kingship as bearing international ramifications, and the cosmic mountain motif showed Yhwh's interest in a new world order. Similarly, when read in the light of Yhwh's kingship, the oracles about Israel's neighbours provide further evidence of Yhwh's political designs.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Pace Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*, 170-171.

⁴⁶ The most recent discussion of Ezekiel's oracles regarding the nations is P. Raabe, 'Transforming the International Status Quo: Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations', in *Transforming Visions*, 187-207.

Like Amos 1:3-2:5 and Jeremiah 46-52, Ezekiel 25-32 contain a coherent collection of oracles against seven nations, likely symbolizing the completeness of the judgment against foreign powers.⁴⁷ The symbolic significance of seven nations in Ezekiel 25-32 deepens upon noting that Ezekiel's interest in Israel's political neighbours also appears in 21:33-37 and Ezekiel 35. Although detailed analysis of this material strains beyond present parameters, two broad themes bear brief observation for appreciating the political import of Yhwh's kingship.

5.1 Yhwh's identity

A common concern with Yhwh's identity links the seven oracles against Israel's neighbours. To all but Ammon and Edom, Yhwh warns 'they will know that I am Yhwh', and even to these two nations, Yhwh's identity still features as the impetus for his actions. To Ammon, he promises vengeance, concluding with '...for I am Yhwh; I have spoken' (v. 37). Yhwh's identity grounds his speech. What is now a commonplace in this study deserves mention once again: at bottom Ezekiel's Yhwh is king. Thus, in castigating Ammon, Yhwh speaks as a political authority greater than the Ammonites' own king, and the looming judgment will fall upon Ammon precisely because Yhwh is king,

Regarding Edom, Yhwh warns, 'they shall know my vengeance' (25:14). Admittedly, Yhwh's identity as king is not equal to his vengeance. But, in displaying his vengeance, Yhwh reveals something of himself. The movement from seeing Yhwh's acts to knowing his being is explicit in the logic of the so-

⁴⁷ L. Boadt, *Ezekiel's Oracles against Egypt: A Literary and Philological Study of Ezekiel 29-32* (BibOr 37; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1980). 9.

called recognition formula.⁴⁸ So, although Ezekiel omits the characteristic epistemological ramification (the recognition formula), knowledge of Yhwh will still precipitate out of his actions.⁴⁹

5.2 Individual enemies

Ezekiel's oracles against the nations diverge from similar material in the prophetic books by concentrating heavily upon individual figures rather than exclusively upon nations as corporate entities.⁵⁰ For example, Yhwh twice addresses the prince of Tyre, justifying and mocking his imminent demise (Ezek 28:1-19).⁵¹ Illumined by the pervasive Ezekielian interest in Yhwh's royal power, Yhwh's displeasure stems less from a religious concern than an interest in political power structures.⁵² From this angle, the problem with the prince's claim, 'I am a god' (vv. 2, 6, 9) is that he has despised his allotted sphere in Yhwh's economy. Yhwh himself had established the prince (v. 14), suggesting that the privileges of wisdom, beauty, influence and wealth were

⁴⁸ Cf. Zimmerli, 'Knowledge of God'.

⁴⁹ J. Strong sees this verse as a modification of the standard formula, 'Ezekiel's Use of the Recognition Formula in His Oracles Against the Nations', *PRS* 22 (1995): 117, n.8.

⁵⁰ C.L. Crouch has helpfully explored the cosmological motifs deployed in the oracles of Ezekiel 25-32, citing the primary purpose as a defence of Yhwh's kingship, 'Ezekiel's Oracles against the Nations in Light of a Royal Ideology of Warfare', *JBL* 130 (2011): 473-492. But Crouch neglects to explain why Ezekiel poses the human kings as challengers to Yhwh's kingship.

⁵¹ As mentioned above, scholars have noted the absence of overt anti-Babylonian material. As a remedy, H.L. Ellison surprisingly determined to find an Ezekielian critique of Nebuchadnezzar by supposing that the oracles against Tyre are meant for Babylon, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (London: Paternoster, 1956), 100-01. But he has not won a following.

⁵² Though recall Chapter 5, n.82 citing McConville's observations regarding the political import of Yhwh's status as Israel's deity.

not, in themselves, abhorrent to Yhwh. Rather, by discontentment and abuse of those privileges the prince defied Yhwh's generosity and accused Yhwh of injustice. Herein lies the prince's problem.

As already seen (e.g., Chapter 6, §3.3), Ezekiel's royal Yhwh is the paragon of justice, and claims to the contrary are tantamount to treason. Further, as Yhwh's 'anointed' (v. 14), the prince was obligated to display loyalty to Yhwh by hailing Yhwh as supreme monarch and by following his pattern of justice. Yet the prince relied upon his own perceived significance (v. 5, 17), flouting Yhwh's law with violence and social corruption (vv. 16-18). Thus, Yhwh's concern in debasing the prince is to maintain justice within the political economy over which he presides. Just as the leaders of Israel receive condemnation separate from the populace, so the prince of Tyre deserves punishment commensurate with his standing and his crimes.

Following his critique of the prince of Tyre, Yhwh addresses Pharaoh (Ezekiel 29-32).⁵³ Following a groundbreaking study of these chapters, Lawrence Boadt assessed their importance as articulating 'Yhwh's pre-eminence as God and rejection of the foreign idols' that so attracted the people of Israel.⁵⁴ However, the oracles against Pharaoh lack polemic against Egypt's gods; Pharaoh himself, as representative of his nation, is the target of Yhwh's verbal barbs but not the Egyptian deities. Like the prince of Tyre, Pharaoh receives Yhwh's condemnation for rejecting the authority structures

⁵³ The chronological discrepancies in the date formulae (29:17-21, 30:1-19) are problematic but unimportant for appreciating the contours of Yhwh's critique of Pharaoh. For a recent solution, Mayfield, *Literary Structure*, 205-206.

⁵⁴ Boadt, *Oracles*, 169.

Chapter 8—Yhwh's Pervasive Kingship

of Yhwh's economy. He vaulted himself into supreme position, daring to claim 'my Nile is my own; I made it' (29:3, 9). On its face, this assertion appears to challenge Yhwh's status as creative deity.⁵⁵ But Ezekiel largely overlooks Yhwh's role in creation; rather, time and again, the focus is Yhwh's place in societal power structures. Pharaoh's error, then, is that he contravened Yhwh's political role.

Later in the oracle cycle Yhwh taunts Pharaoh, 'you think yourself like a lion of the nations, but you are like a monster in the sea...I will spread my net over you' (32:2-3). Here, as earlier (29:6-9), Pharaoh's infraction is abuse of power on the international stage. The context of the Pharaoh oracles confirms Yhwh's concern as primarily political, not religious. In Ezekiel 31, Yhwh compares Pharaoh and his cohort to the once-mighty tree that was Assyria. Like the prince of Tyre, the Assyrian tree received condemnation for pride, and like Pharaoh, competition with Yhwh's divine status is absent. Also missing, though, is even a hint of the social crimes that beset Pharaoh and the prince. The most coherent explanation for the Assyrian tree's demise is rooted in Yhwh's claim, 'I made it beautiful' (v. 9). As the world's supreme political figure, Yhwh was responsible for the rise of all his underlings, but Assyria defaulted on her loyalty to Yhwh, supposing that she alone effected her greatness. Such a stance is tantamount to treason because the subject has

⁵⁵ So, Clements, *Ezekiel*, 132.

replaced the master. Only a political reading of the Assyrian tree makes full sense of Yhwh's complaint and the analogy with Pharaoh.⁵⁶

Similarly, the chant-like conclusion to Ezekiel 32 highlights the political dynamic at the core of Yhwh's judgment on Pharaoh. Speaking of Sheol, where Yhwh will send Pharaoh, Yhwh says, 'Assyria is there and all her assembly, its graves all around them' (v. 22), and, following this pattern Yhwh identifies Elam, Meshech-Tubal, Edom, the princes of the north, and the Sidonians, each with supporters slain in battle. As the presumed victor, Yhwh and his kingship come to the fore because reference to Edom 'and her kings' as well as the princes of the north orients Yhwh's focus to the nations as political enemies.

A final component of the oracles deserves brief mention. Though referenced in Ezekiel 17 and 21, the king of Babylon features more prominently in the drama of retribution that occupies Ezekiel 25-32. Pointing to the king's significance, only here does the name 'Nebuchadnezzar' appear in the book.⁵⁷ And, while Yhwh's judgment on Judah clearly employed Nebuchadnezzar, here Yhwh explicitly affirms his manipulation of Nebuchadnezzar, e.g., 'I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon...and [Egypt] will know that I am Yhwh when I put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon' (30:24). Once again, Yhwh's sovereignty transcends national

⁵⁶ Linking tree and king in Assyria, S. Parpola, 'The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy', *JNES* 52 (1993), 161-208.

⁵⁷ Ezek 26:7, 29:18-19, 30:10. The Hebrew more closely transliterates the Babylonian king's name in Akkadian with 'Nebuchadrezzar'. But the common Nebuchadnezzar is used here out of convention.

borders and extends even to outright control of the ancient Near East's dominant figure.

Conclusion

Though brisk, this chapter has shown that Yhwh's kingship pervades the book of Ezekiel, impinging on the real-world political order. A reasonable conclusion, then, is that Yhwh's kingship is not a cipher for his exalted divinity but describes Ezekiel's conviction that Yhwh is a legitimate political entity, the true king of Israel. Pointing toward this conclusion are the repeated references to Israel as Yhwh's rebel nation that deserves his military might because they have defied his rule. Yet, as elsewhere, Ezekiel's Yhwh is still the deity of Israel, for his people's treasonous crimes include aligning themselves to his religious enemies, what Ezekiel terms the 'dung gods and detestable things'.

Equally, though, the people have rejected their king by contravening his law, a point underscored by the numerous references to legal material. Yhwh also appears as a royal figure in avenging his honour with the sword, particularly when targeting Israel's leaders. Yhwh's attacks on foreign powers appear to be motivated by avenging the crimes his people have suffered, to some degree a reasonable inference. But, more likely, asserting the supremacy of Yhwh's kingship is the primary impetus for the oracles against the foreign powers. The overt instances of Yhwh's kingship that occupied earlier chapters of this study are not alone in proclaiming that Yhwh is a genuine king. The whole book of Ezekiel hails him as the dominant power over Israel and the ancient Near East. Here is no metaphorical king but a triumphant, regnant king who deserves and will obtain cosmic loyalty.

CHAPTER 9—IS EZEKIEL’S YHWH THE KING? (CONCLUSION)

1. Summary

In seven chapters this thesis has investigated how the book of Ezekiel depicts Yhwh as a king, paying special attention to whether Yhwh’s kingship in Ezekiel is a political force rather than merely a theological metaphor. To date, scholarship has largely neglected these matters. The importance of this project, then, is that it throws new light upon Yhwh’s kingship in the book of Ezekiel by exploring the politics of Yhwh’s kingship rather than merely its theological connotations.

Chapter 2 replaced the linguistic foundations on which Yhwh’s kingship has commonly been viewed as metaphorical. The new approach introduced a theoretical basis for building a reassessment of Yhwh’s kingship, arguing that utterances occur in gradations of transparency rather than binary categories of metaphorical and literal. When applied to the subject of Yhwh’s kingship, this approach allows the interpreter to examine whether the Hebrew Bible presents Yhwh’s kingship as more literal or more figurative without being forced to view royal depictions of Yhwh as metaphor.

Chapters 3-7 examined the five overt expressions of Yhwh’s kingship in Ezekiel. Of special interest was how the various passages depicted Yhwh participating in the public exercise and legitimation of power, that is, politics. Chapter 3 found that Yhwh’s royal identity is the focal point of the prophet’s first vision. There Yhwh appears as a king confident of military success, prepared to exert his authority in order to subdue rebellion. This initial vision of Ezekiel’s Yhwh suggests the legitimacy of reading Yhwh’s kingship

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politically, for both the literary orientation of Ezekiel 1 and the subsequent exposition of the kingship in Ezekiel 2-5 depict Yhwh engaged in matters of public power.

Chapter 4 explored the royal ripples emanating throughout the pericope of Ezekiel 8-11. Here Yhwh exerts his royal authority upon his people. His royal identity colours cultic abuses in a political hue, and, like a warrior king, Yhwh responds to four scenes of abomination by commanding a militia that dispatches the rebels guilty of the abominations. While Yhwh encounters rebellion as the chief characteristic of his people, his interest lies particularly in the power structures that failed to provide justice for the people. Thus, the cultic emphases find their best explanation as violations of Yhwh's authority. His kingship again appears oriented towards the exercise and legitimation of public power, that is, politics.

Chapter 5 explored Ezekiel 20 and found Yhwh's kingship characterized by certainty and military overtones. The key developments of Chapter 4—that the cultic equals the political and that Yhwh is concerned with the power structures leading his people—are key for appreciating the dynamics of Yhwh's kingship here. Chapter 5 also uncovered another dimension to Yhwh's kingship, namely the full expression of his rule located in a future era. While Chapters 3-4 showed Yhwh as an unwavering king, here Yhwh appeared with muted kingship, its grandeur only to be appreciated in an unspecified future when he rules over national Israel. Ezekiel's Yhwh is thus a complex figure, resisting reduction to a single role.

Chapter 6, examining Ezekiel 34, also encountered this dynamic, as Yhwh again locates the expression of his kingship in the future. Juxtaposed

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with the fearsome king of Chapters 3-4, Yhwh's royalty emerges as still more complex and multifaceted. Another component of Yhwh's kingship appeared in Chapter 6 with the introduction of the Davidic figure who will participate in Yhwh's rule. Both this figure (the *nāšî'*) and Yhwh will replace the failed human leadership that Yhwh verbally dismantles in vv. 2-10. There is little doubt that Yhwh himself is engaged in the political machinery of his people, upending abusive power, reconstituting his dispersed people and showering them with beneficence. But Yhwh, the shepherd king, is still Israel's god, indicated not least by the eschatological designation for the day when Yhwh will unveil his kingship most fully (v. 12). Again the complexity of Yhwh's royal identity is apparent.

Chapter 7, then, meets the deity-king in the fullness of his kingship. Here Ezek 43:7 sends royal ripples across Ezekiel 40-48. Yhwh engages the power structures of Israel's new society, thereby validating and securing his own power. He distributes land to the key stakeholders in his kingdom as well as to the people themselves. Indeed, Yhwh alone is the organizing force that establishes his people, resulting in a royal decree that all society, even all the world, will experience the essence of his rule—holiness. This element again raises the complexity of Yhwh's kingship, for, while diffused beyond the temple, his holiness is also concentrated within the temple. Taking stock of both components counters an urge to reduce Yhwh's kingship and suggests, in turn, that Ezekiel's Yhwh merits the designation 'king' and its political connotations, even if not in the same sense as a David, Jeroboam, Jehoiachin or Nebuchadnezzar.

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Chapter 8 briskly traced the subthemes of Yhwh's kingship finding that Yhwh's kingship pervades the book of Ezekiel. Yhwh engages those who rebel against his authority and wages battle to subdue them. He legislates for the wellbeing of his people. And he contends with foreign political powers. Is Yhwh, then, a king?

2. Untying the knot

As seen in Chapter 2, the task of defining a figure as a 'king' in the Hebrew Bible encounters a nexus of qualities and actions. So, just as both Jehu, lacking dynastic justification for kingship, and Jehoiachin, lacking kingdom and throne, can be king, a reasonable inference permits Yhwh also to be king, provided he warrants the title. To draw on the specialist vocabulary floated in Chapter 2, the notion of 'functional conceptual ascription' allows that Yhwh, like Jehoiachin or Jehu, can be king if he acts like a king.

According to Ezekiel, several common components of 'king' apply to Yhwh, chiefly the authority he exercises over his subjects. While other entities govern facets of Israel's national life, Yhwh alone oversees the whole of the people's political existence. When disapproval with Yhwh leads the people to rebel, Yhwh reasserts his authority, ending the rebellion and subduing the people under his rule. He wages war against his enemies, and the frequent attribution of sword-wielding especially testifies to Yhwh's character as a royal warrior. Admittedly, Ezekiel does not envision Yhwh as a human king swinging a physical sword since he specifically identifies the king of Babylon as Yhwh's sword. But the repeated characterization of Yhwh as swordsman who attacks enemies and triumphs militarily communicates that Ezekiel's Yhwh acts like a king.

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While Ezekiel's Yhwh appears primarily as an authoritarian king, raining retribution upon disloyal subjects and hostile enemies, Ezekiel does not fully neglect the more constructive elements of kingship. Among other texts in the Hebrew Bible, Prov 31:1-9 indicates that the ancient world prized a king who nurtured and nourished his people. Equally, Ezekiel's Yhwh promises to provide for his people. As seen especially in Ezekiel 34 (Chapter 6), Yhwh's project of provision begins by eliminating the authorities that oppress his people. Ezekiel 34, like its more developed counterpart of Ezekiel 40-48, presents Yhwh as a royal figure who secures the loyalty of his people by ensuring their inability to rebel. Not only will their physical needs be met, but Yhwh will establish them in unending intimacy with himself, chiefly by establishing a human ruler endowed with his own qualities.

The strongest indication that Ezekiel views Yhwh's kingship as a genuine political force on par with the kingship of a Jehu or Jehoiachin lies in the future role Ezekiel envisions for Yhwh. Ezekiel's utopian future hinges upon Yhwh's exercise of royal prerogatives. As a king, Yhwh, and not a human monarch, will resettle the people. He is the supreme political authority which the final vision showcases variously. His decrees govern Israel and her leaders. He sustains them from his bounty, apportioning their land and ensuring their peace.

The brevity of the climactic claim 'I will reign as king over you' (20:33) understates the significance of Yhwh's kingship and masks the expansive scope of its fullness. But the final vision (40-48) provides a wider perspective, showing that every facet of Israel's national life will be oriented towards serving the king and reaping his beneficence. Ezekiel hails Yhwh alone as the

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supreme ruler of Israel. Not only is Ezekiel's Yhwh the ruler of Israel, but he is the great king whose power transcends national boundaries and conscripts foreign powers for his royal purposes.

While Jehoiachin may merit the title 'king' (1:2), given his dynastic inheritance and former role in Judean society, as a captive of Nebuchadnezzar he is a ghost of king. Yhwh, in contrast, is a mighty warrior who subdues rebels and wields a sword that conquers whole nations. Both Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh, figures more powerful than Jehoiachin, are his subjects. Yhwh, unlike Jehoiachin, protects and provides for his people. In the final analysis, if plotted on the transparency spectrum developed in Chapter 2, the sentence 'Jehoiachin is king' is less literal than 'Yhwh is king'. Yhwh's kingship then, may be rescued from the confines of metaphorical analysis and placed firmly within the realms of political discourse.

Levenson, summarizing the role of the *nāšî'* in Ezekiel 40-48 averred, 'Ezekiel envisioned a kingdom without politics...'.¹ In contrast, this study has shown that Ezekiel did envision politics. Power brokering occupies a major portion of the final vision, for, without Yhwh's political expertise, Israel's future crumbles. Ezekiel's king is Yhwh.

3. Trajectories

When read within its purported context of the high sixth century BCE, the book of Ezekiel offers a reasonable rationale for positing Yhwh as Israel's king. Externally, Nebuchadnezzar has dominated and decimated Judah's political fortunes. Internally, injustice reigns so supreme that, if Ezekiel is to

¹Levenson, *Theology*, III.

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be believed, the late seventh and early sixth century BCE Judah mimicked the chaos portrayed in the concluding chapters of the book of Judges. Yet Frankfort opened his landmark book by observing that 'the ancient Near East considered kingship the very basis of civilization',² a sentiment captured in the proverb, 'A people without a king (is like) sheep without a shepherd'.³ Not surprisingly, then, kingship is integral to the fabric of Ezekiel's world. With oppression and chaos threatening to dissolve the corporate identity of his people, it is no wonder that Ezekiel devotes such space to Yhwh's kingship.⁴

If the book's assumed setting explains Ezekiel's emphasis on Yhwh's kingship, it also suggests the fruitfulness of exploring the same theme in other tracts of the Hebrew Bible reflecting a similar social situation.⁵ The light of political crises besetting Israel or Judah may illuminate the political dynamics of Yhwh's kingship elsewhere, e.g., Isaiah 6 with the death of Uzziah or Zechariah 14 with the absence of a Judahite king during Persian hegemony.

Numerous other examples could show the significance of Yhwh's kingship for the political fortunes of his oppressed people. Admittedly, Yhwh's kingship receives fervent acclamation in dozens of psalms which

² Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 3.

³ Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 232.

⁴ Cf. the rationale for kingship offered in R. Bendix, *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1978), 21.

⁵ As suggested by H.-J. Kraus, *Die Königsherrschaft Gottes im Alten Testament: Untersuchungen zu Lidern von Jahwes Thronbesteigung* (BHT 13; Tübingen: Mohr, 1951), III.

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scholars would be hard-pressed to date exclusively to the decades and centuries of political vacuum that followed Israel's and Judah's misfortunes. But expecting a univocal testimony to Yhwh's kingship is unnecessary. The transparency spectrum developed in Chapter 2 accommodates varying significances of the claim 'Yhwh is king'. External and internal crises may induce Ezekiel and similar literature to reverberate with strong political tones while psalms originating in more stable political times use the theme more figuratively. In the one, Yhwh's kingship stems from a failure of the human institution. In the other, Yhwh's kingship may owe more to the common, ancient trope that kingship is a divine prerogative. Further research along the trajectories sketched in this project will provide a more transparent perception of how Yhwh's kingship functions within the political paradigms portrayed in the Hebrew Bible.

4. Confirmations

This study has found that Ezekiel affirms that Yhwh is king while also depicting a political world without crisp distinctions. Yhwh is king, but so are Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah and Pharaoh. What is more, in Israel's restored future, Yhwh will be king, reigning supreme and unchallenged, but he will endow a human figure with his own power. Yhwh's kingship thus inhabits a tension between present and future realities.

Ambiguity is not foreign to the Hebrew Bible, perhaps least of all to the book of Ezekiel. For example, divine presence and divine absence play major roles in the drama of Yhwh's interaction with his people.⁶ Kutsko even

⁶ Chiefly, Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*. Also Block, 'Divine Abandonment' and Tuell, 'Divine Presence and Absence'.

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sees Yhwh's absence as 'both theodicy and theophany'.⁷ Similarly, Joyce sees a tension between the locales of divine presence; Yhwh is both present in Jerusalem and in the exile.⁸ Recent scholarship has also wrestled with the apparent dilemma of the prophet Ezekiel's own identity. Is he a priestly prophet or a prophetic priest?⁹ Mein's monograph posited a duality of moral worlds in Ezekiel.¹⁰ And, of course, the book of Ezekiel is renowned for the apparent contradiction represented by Yhwh's statements 'make yourselves a new heart and new spirit' (18:31) and 'I will give you a new heart and a new spirit' (36:26).¹¹ Adding another pair of apparent contrasts—Yhwh as god and king—creates further cohesion in a book already known for its literary unity.

What is more, tracing the tensions of Yhwh's identity deepens the near commonplace of citing Ezekiel as preoccupied with the character of Yhwh. From front to back, Ezekiel is an argument for Yhwh's superiority. This study shows that Ezekiel views Yhwh's religious dimension as inextricably knitted to the political so that, as a deity-king, Yhwh's identity frames rival deities as his political enemies; devotees of rival deities are thus guilty of treason against Yhwh. In turn, this pits Yhwh against the political leaders of Israel. Their defiance of Yhwh's legislation merits judgment, not

⁷ Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 99.

⁸ Joyce, 'Ascent Narrative', 37.

⁹ Compare the articles by Patton and Block in *EHW*.

¹⁰ Mein, *Ethics of Exile*.

¹¹ Comprehensively, Joyce, *Divine Initiative*.

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chiefly because they have violated cultic regulations, but because they have failed to honour their ultimate authority. Foreign powers also face Yhwh's political clout on account of a patent disregard for Yhwh's role as arch-authority. Future thematic work in Ezekiel will benefit from the sharpened focus that this study provides with its identification of Yhwh as both god and king.

More broadly, academic study of the Hebrew Bible gains a fresh perspective, challenging trends that notice the theological dimensions of Yhwh's kingship. More attention to the varied political contours of Yhwh's kingship will break new horizons in the study of a dominant motif in the Hebrew Bible. Whether the politics of Yhwh's kingship are opaque or transparent, this thesis provides both springboard and foil for mining a rich vein in the Hebrew Bible.

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